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ALCAZAR;

OR,

THE DARK AGES.

A NOVEL.

BY

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"THE WABASH", "MODERN SOCIETY IN ROME",
ETC.

"Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori,
Le cortesie, l'audaci impresi io canto."
ARIOSTO.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE DARK AGES.

CHAPTER I.

"Amants, heureux amants, voulez-vous voyager?
Que ce soit aux rives prochaines.
Soyez-vous l'un à l'autre un monde toujours beau,
Toujours divers, toujours nouveau;
Tenez-vous lieu de tout, comptez pour rien le reste."

La Fontaine.

ENGLAND is the only country we know of in which newly married couples hasten away from their families and friends to spend in solitude that "honey-moon" which is often introductory to so much bitter disappointment. On the continent, the day of a wedding and the subsequent days are a time of public rejoicing in the families and amongst the acquaintances of

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the bride and bridegroom,—they themselves taking part in every entertainment, promoting the song, the festivity and the dance, and calling upon all to witness the happiness that is, or is presumed to be, theirs.

Such was the system on which marriages were celebrated in Sicily at the period of which we write: and although the stronger mind of the Countess Clemence led her to believe that her future would not be less happy because it was not ushered in by these customary rejoicings, yet her companion-bride, the gentle and youthful Agata dell' Aquila, could ill reconcile herself to the suddenness and the comparative privacy of her nuptials. True, that they had been celebrated by some of the first dignitaries of the Church, and had been witnessed by a score of the noblest knights in Sicily; still, all these had been imme-

diately called away by the urgency of public affairs, and the little lady had felt her spirit overshadowed by undiversified seclusion with her husband and with the noble bride and bridegroom of Taverna. It was, indeed, a fearful thing to have contracted these unions in defiance of the express prohibition of the sovereign, and with the avowed object of hastening on a civil war, in which the husbands of both must triumph or endure the anger of a resentful and unforgiving prince: and neither our heroine nor her little friend could look forward to the future without anticipations which they endeavoured to conceal from one another and, still more, from their new lords.

Let it, also, be remembered that the castle of Mistretto, in which the marriage had taken place, had been rendered more than usually silent and secluded, not only

by the absence of its boisterous owner, Sieur Tommaso, but also by the order which the Conte dell' Aquila had imposed upon the officer in command of the little garrison. Anticipating a long campaign of violence and of separation from his bride, he had resolved that the three days following their union should be snatched from the impending conspiracy: and again and again had he reiterated his order that no messenger or visitor should, under whatever pretext, be admitted within the fortress. Taverna and his bright-souled wife were not likely to object to the proposal: although they pretended to ridicule the sentimental ardour of the youth, they congratulated themselves that he had, in a boyish freak, given an order by which they profited, and which they might have been unwilling to have given themselves.

The second day after the marriage of

the two happy couples was drawing to a close. Slowly, if all must be owned, it had worn away within those dull walls. No garden, in which they might have strolled, was enclosed within its outer defences; no library was there, in which they might have found their own thoughts and feelings clothed in words more varied than their own. Still, it had been sweet for the four to sit over the crackling Christmas fire in the old hall below, and to keep up a sprightly general conversation; while, two and two, they sympathetically applied personal meanings to what seemed unmeaning general remarks; and, while the exchange of bright glances or of gentle pressures of the fingers, as, hand in hand, each couple sat together in the huge chimney, told the bliss of hope realized, and of a long future of happiness. Thus, indeed, had many a half hour slid

unobserved away. Many, too, had passed while, arm in arm, they sauntered along the battlements of the castle, or stood on the leads of the keep. They were there, indeed, in the sight of the sentinels on guard; but no envious eyes or ears could have perceived those thrilling pressures with which the arm of either was grasped or borne to the heart of the other; or those fond glances of affection, which told even more than the softest whispers that accompanied them; calling up innocent blushes of triumph and delight.

And thus they sauntered up and down the battlements; and thus they looked down upon the hamlet beneath them; upon the evergreen hills in the distance, thickly studded with villas and with the castles of many a Norman friend and acquaintance. They knew that all these were inhabited: they knew that all who

peopled them had once experienced joys and anticipations such as were then their own; did they shudder as they heard a harsh and bitter-toned voice rise upwards from the village, or as they remembered the well-known matrimonial bickerings and indifference of some husband and wife of higher rank? All these had loved as they loved now: all these had hoped as they hoped now: the past of all these was their present: would their own future be solitary exceptions to the sad realities around? They would! they would! *They* could never cool down to apathy and indifference! *Their* eyes could never forget to smile! *Their* lips could never utter words of harshness! *They*, at least, were made for each other; and their feelings were too warm, too holy, too well-founded ever to be dulled and debased down to the level of those of common husbands and wives.

Did they think and feel all this? And did they laugh lightly at others who had thrown away chances of bliss which they, at least, had secured for ever? If they did, each whispered the sentiment in the ear of his blushing mate; and sympathetic smiles promised that that which they perceived to be the fate of thousands, if not of all, should never, never be theirs!

"And now let us go down to collation," exclaimed our heroine cheerily. "The air is getting chill, and dear Agata has not been so inured to cold as I have."

"Remind me not, dearest Clemence," replied the Baron of Taverna fondly, "remind me not of thy daring escape from the Favara. Whenever I think of it, I envy poor Ricardo Mardano the service it was his happy lot to render thee."

"Nay, Matteo; I doubt if I could have trusted my life to thine art of swimming as

I did to his. I think Mustafa here," she said archly, patting the head of the great black curly-haired dog which we have before seen to be her favourite. "I think Mustafa here would have been a safer guide. But go, Mustafa," she cried, "go and bid the lady Agata to follow us."

She tripped down the winding stairs of the battlement, while the dog flew off to another part of the works where the Lady of Aquila walked with her bridegroom. Taking her robe gently in his teeth, he motioned her to follow his mistress.

"What, are they gone?" she exclaimed looking round. "Let us follow them, Ruggiero," she said, and she pressed towards the stairs.

"It would be quite wrong to stay here alone with me, would it not?" he whispered.

They dived down the stairs: and, in a

darkened angle of the turret, where Taverna had also delayed Clemence an instant, dell' Aquila drew himself up and took willing toll from the lips of his happy bride.

A light refection awaited them in the hall, to fill up the time between a mid-day dinner and an early supper. Cheerfully they sat down or stood around the table; and an animated and general conversation succeeded to the more confidential whispers which each couple had enjoyed on the leads.

"Sing us a song, Matteo," exclaimed Clemence at length. "Time was when thy voice was the readiest in the concert. Thou hast been so grave of late, I have not heard thee sing for this age."

"With pleasure, sweetheart, if thou wilt join in the glee," responded the baron.

"Nay, nay; I will sing after; that is

to say, if the humour holds," she answered.

The lady Agata and dell' Aquila both called for the song; and, with some of that diffidence that was natural to him, our hero sang out, in a full manly voice, the following

NORMAN TRIUMPH.

Success to the Normans! Success to the brave!
The world—the wide world is their own.
'Tis theirs to redeem it or theirs to enslave—
To destroy or to build up a throne.
For who can withstand them? With sword and with lance,
And with charger that pants for the shock,
Like giants, they leap from their cradle in France:—
At their tramp, paynims quake, kingdoms rock!

They have conquered in Syria, England, and Greece:
They have made the earth's garden their own,
They cast lots for the kingdoms that moulder in peace:—
A toss-up wins them sceptre and crown.
East, west, north, and south, they go forth o'er the land,
And they carve out the world at their will,
There lives not a people their lance can withstand:—
Cheer the Normans and brave de Hauteville!

"Treason, Matteo," cried dell' Aquila as the baron concluded the last line: "treason

to our noble conspiracy! The descendants of de Hauteville are not just now in such favour with the Normans that we should sing their praises. Remember that we, of all men, have little reason to glorify William de Hauteville the Bad."

"Sir Count dell' Aquila," said the lady Clemence gaily, "I shall impose the fine of a song upon you, and we all know your native bashfulness, if you break through your own rule, and talk of kings and conspiracies. For the next two days, we know nothing here of kings, be they good or bad: and I marvel that, with dear Agata sitting at your side, you can allude to such unpleasant subjects—or topics rather, as their lordships are not yet subject to even our valiant selves. Matteo, we have heard thy song before—in the tented field and in the guard-room. It is too boastful by half! a Norman knight is worthless unless

a Norman dame inspire him. Listen all to my more truthful lay."

And in a full, glorious but sweet contralto voice, she sang

THE FORESHADOWING OF CHIVALRY.

Norman swords are bright and keen;
Norman lances tough I ween;
Norman steeds of metal high,
Fit for Norman chivalry;
But, without a lover's heart,
What were Norman, what his art?
Arm him, send him forth to fight—
In truth, he is but half a knight.
Up, up, Sir Norman! up and dare!
He is nought till I am there!

Norman swords would rust away;
Norman lances soon decay;
Norman steeds would lose their fire;
Norman chivalry expire,
Did not fondest hopes supply
Aim and zeal and energy:
These have made the Norman knight:
These have sent him forth to fight:
These have bid him up and dare;
These have promised guerdon fair!

Norman hearts two spirits hold:
Can a Norman *not* be bold?
Vain would be the Norman's art
Did not woman rule his heart.

Love and valour urge to fame;
Half his triumphs, half, I claim:
'Twas I who sent him forth to fight,
'Twas I, 'twas I who dubb'd him knight.
Bravely see him do and dare!
'Tis I inspire him! I am there!

"'Thou art, indeed, dear Clemence," said Agata gently, when the applause had ceased which had greeted the very spirited music and style in which our heroine had sung these simple words, "thou art indeed fit to be the bride of a Norman:—thou art formed to urge him on to deeds of valour, and to receive him victor on his return."

"Be not too sure that I should await his return, carina!" exclaimed Clemence gaily. "How many of our mothers fought beside their husbands in these very countries! I was always reckoned a good horsewoman; and the enchanted lance of the Saracen ghost came, methought, familiar to my hand."

"Who would not take service under

such a leader!" exclaimed Ruggiero dell' Aquila gallantly. "Deign, brave lady, to name me one of your captains."

"I know not, Signor Conte," replied Clemence with mock gravity: "I must first inquire diligently into the circumstances of those whom I honour by allowing them to gather around my standard. I must beware lest they own a divided allegiance. I must see that their second heart, of which we have sung, goes with the first; that it glories in deeds of arms, and excites to victory. How sayest thou, sweet Agata? give us thy thoughts on the subject:—but in song, mark you. It is now thy turn."

"Oimé! but I have nothing as spirited as what we have just heard," replied the blushing Agata. "My ditties are all solemn: they would too much sober our mirth."

"A song, a song, sweet demoiselle," exclaimed Taverna. "Sing according to your own spirit, and it must be sweet."

"Too prettily spoken, by half!" said the Countess of Taverna. "Seigneur husband mine, I do not approve such gallant phrases. Sing, dear Agata, sing—as badly and as solemnly as thou canst, to show him that he ought to have addressed his courtesies elsewhere."

Her own husband fondly asked her not to refuse to favour them; and thus pressed, Agata dell' Aquila, with her face and neck suffused with blushes, and in a sweet and gentle tone of voice, began to sing of what then seemed to be

A DREAM.

I have dreamed of a time when the nations at rest
Should speak of these wars as of woes that have been;
When the poor and the lowly and weak should be blest,
And no symbol of terror or might should be seen.

Oh, bright, to my fancy, the wilderness smil'd!
The vines grew untouch'd, undespoil'd o'er the way;
The peasant secure stacked his corn in the field;
And the year seem'd as though 'twere one long holiday.

Oh tell me—oh tell; can these times never come?
Will mankind ne'er pluck down the red banner of war?
Will they ne'er still the trumpet and murderous drum,
And turn from wild hopes to the blessings that are?
Oh the world it is sweet, would ye let it be so!
It is bright with all goodness reflected from heaven:
Pride cannot repay what for pride we forego:
Oh this life was for something far holier given!

As she concluded her sweet and hopeful strain, her bridegroom, who sat beside her, silently raised her hand and pressed it affectionately to his lips. He then held it awhile in suspense; for Mustafa, who had been lying on the hearth before the fire, in the centre of the group, and had seemed buried in the deepest sleep, suddenly uttered a low growl. A moment afterwards he sprang up, and gave a single deep-toned bark, looking round to the Lady Clemence, as if he rejoiced that the monotony of their party was likely to be dispelled. At the

same instant the horn at the bars of the castle gate echoed faintly from the embrasures in the walls.

"I hope no one is coming to break in upon our *partie quarrée!*" exclaimed the Baron of Taverna.

"I will take good care of that!" cried dell' Aquila. "Woe be to whomsoever disputes my orders, now that they are uttered by two of us;—as the song of the Lady Clemence avers they are," he added, laughing as he rose and left the hall.

He went out into the court-yard, lighted by the myriad stars that were coming out in the blue Christmas sky overhead. He crossed it, and stood beside the drawbridge at the gate. An altercation was going on between the officer in command and a trooper and a female on horseback outside. He stood and listened to it with mischievous glee. Both, and especially the

female, were pressing upon the guard their request to be admitted; which he was, at the same time, parrying with no very willing resolution.

"Nay but, by all the blessed saints!" said the woman, "are the Normans sunk so low that they should turn away a lady from their castle gates at this time of night? The very Saracens will blush to hear of it!"

"Who art thou, mistress?" asked the officer in a relenting tone.

"You know me not, sieur Chastelein," she replied. "But only let it be told to the lady Contessa that her attendant Theresa is subjected to this delay, and I know little of her if the insult doth not greatly move her."

"I will report the case, good dame," said the officer turning away.

"Thou wilt, wilt thou!" cried dell'

Aquila at his elbow. "If such is the manner in which my orders are to be obeyed, I must seek me other deputies while thou art under arrest."

"Monseigneur, I knew not . . ." pleaded the officer.

"Enough. You did know, sir. Keep your post now; and know that I am not to be trifled with," replied the youth, more bent upon maintaining his whim, than he would have been had it involved a matter of important discipline.

"Who art thou, my man?" he asked of the trooper who stood with Theresa outside the gate.

"A follower of Ricardo Mardano, the lord of Taverna's squire; and I pray your signoria to admit me to my lord. I have news for him."

"Keep it, then, for the next two days, good fellow," answered dell' Aquila. "I

would as willingly lodge a firebrand in a stack of straw as admit a follower of the Irishman into a household that had vowed to be peaceful for three days. Good night, good folks," he added laughing: "a pleasant lodging to ye, so that it be not within these walls."

"Nay but, Monseigneur,"—remonstrated the man.

"Answer him, Mustafa! answer him!" said the youth, urging on the great dog who had followed him from the hall.

Mustafa asked for no better sport: and barking furiously, he rushed against the bars of the gate—making every pretence that he would overleap them, which he, as well as the count, well knew he could not do. The disconcerted wanderers withdrew in terror; and dell' Aquila, after again and again urging on the dog, at length called him off and ran back to his friends in the hall.

"Whom have you been tearing to pieces, Ruggiero?" asked Clemence, while she patted the great dog as he stood by her side, panting with exertion—and with his red tongue hanging from his black chaps: "Whom have you been tearing to pieces?"

"Only a particular friend of yours, fair lady," replied the youth. "A certain Theresa, who came here under the custody of one sent by thy firebrand, the Irishman, Matteo; and who swore that the countess would revenge the insult upon me."

"And by Saint Martin of Tours, so I will!" exclaimed our heroine. "The first time I don armour, I will break a lance against your body. Poor Theresa! but I am truly sorry, if you have sent her away."

"And I would fain have seen Richard Mardano's follower," said Taverna. "He may have had important news."

"The very reason for which I sent him

about his business!" cried dell' Aquila laughing. "No: no: we shall have enough of news and of interests of all kinds, depend upon it, when we once leave Mistretto. Here, at least, I am resolved that, according to compact, we will not hear of them."

"What a strange presentiment seems to hang over thee, Ruggiero!" exclaimed Taverna. "Thou wert not wont to be so thoughtful and far-seeing."

"He intends to set up as a rival to the monk Giovacchino," said Clemence, laughing. "Santa Maria, how wise and prudent we shall be with two such monitors to forewarn us."

"Depend upon it that we should not receive their suggestions as willingly as if they were the offspring of our own unassisted judgment," observed our hero. "Man feels intuitively that, in this life, his only chance of happiness lies in his igno-

rance of the future: and his mind recoils, of itself, from acknowledging a power that would reduce him to a piece of mechanism, doomed to fulfil an allotted part, over which he would seem to have no control."

"Was that the reason, signor mio," asked the lady Clemence archly, "that made thee slight the warning of a certain white prophetess of the hills, of whom I have heard; and turn to me in defiance of threats from heaven and of allurements from earth."

"Doubtless that was the only cause," he replied softly. "The allurement of Clemence of Catanzaro could offer no compensation."

Thus they playfully chatted over the dying embers in that now tranquil mountain fortress. Thus they resolutely kept themselves in ignorance of the changes that were hurrying on that event in which their happiness, nay their very lives, were

involved. And while thus they chatted playfully, but idly, their brother conspirators were maturing those plans which, on the following morning led, as we have recorded, to the sudden dethronement of King William and to the elevation of the innocent little boy whose life had so soon fallen a sacrifice to the rage of his jealous and brutal father.

CHAPTER II.

"Look, as I blow this feather from my face,
And as the air blows it to me again,
Obeying with my wind when I do blow,
And yielding to another when it blows,
Commanded always by the greatest gust;—
Such is the likeness of your common men."

Henry VI.

But neither the populace of Palermo, who had triumphed in the success of the revolution, nor their betters, knew aught of the death of him whom they had placed upon his father's throne. Prince Simon of Policastro carefully concealed the fact even from the bulk of his brother conspirators: and the day went down and the night came on and the people of Palermo still believed that they had a boy-king; and that he, Policastro, was regent for the child. The

tumults of the day had been in a great measure appeased by the wise precautions of the regent and of Sanseverino: and the streets of Palermo showed little more excitement on this, the first night after the dethronement of one sovereign and the election of another, than usually pervaded its moon-lit streets. The guards dozed as usual on their beats around the Alcazar; the appearance of the Cassaro was unchanged, save that the mob had removed the instruments of King William's vengeance, and had given decent burial to the bodies that, for crimes untold and unasked, had swung there, upon the gibbets, for the dogs: Duke Roger's clock gave out the hour in its usual impressive tone: the gates of the fortified quarter allotted to the Saracens were locked and guarded as formerly: and the bright Christmas moon, silvering all, beautified whatever had not

been disturbed, and mantled over the ruin which the preceding day had brought about wherever private revenge or national antipathies had seized the opportunity to glut their passions.

Calm and uneventful, however, as seemed the night, there were those at work throughout its every hour who wished to reawaken discord with the coming day, and for their own class advantage, or from mistaken feelings of duty, to restore that power of which a rejoicing people had so lately hailed the downfall. We have seen that the Saracens had suffered severely from the first outburst of the Sicilian mob, jealous of the favour which King William had ever shewn them: and we have recorded that the clergy had held themselves aloof from the revolutionists, and that few of them had taken the oath of allegiance proposed to them by the prince's tutor, the

Archdeacon of Cefalù. It was curious that different feelings should have united parties whose sentiments and interests were at all other times so dissimilar. And yet, throughout that peaceful night, Saracens and clergy wound, noiselessly, from house to house; and many an unconcerted gathering was held by either party, where the only subject considered was, How to restore the favourer of the Saracens and the legitimate sovereign to his throne.

In the quarter of the Saracens, no one was more active to bring about this end than Abderachman, the outlaw. His pretended claims upon the lands of Cacabo, we have already heard him assert, and his resolve to oppose the new order of government in which Taverna would be a leading ruler. From door to door, he threaded his noiseless way; and generally found, in the excited feelings of his countrymen, fit mat-

ter on which to impress his angry spirit. They were, indeed, maddened by the injuries to which the popular fury had exposed them during the preceding day; and they readily adopted any plan that promised vengeance for the past and security for the future.

Nor, among the Christian population of Palermo, was there wanting one who possessed more than ordinary claims upon the feelings of the people. The Calabrian prophet-monk, Giovacchino, was amongst them: and, although he had himself foretold the revolution to King William, he still worked, with the other clergy, to repair what they considered to be an outrage upon law and right. They, the clergy, could easily meet together and concoct their own measures: they could easily organize the plans most likely to produce the counter-revolution for which they resolved

to labour: and, so soon as the people were astir on the following morning, they were astir amongst them and endeavouring to instil into them the principles which they themselves held to be right.

This, however, could not be so easily effected as they at first imagined: for the memory of Majone's tyranny was still so fresh, that the people as yet clung to our hero, Matteo of Taverna, whose sword had delivered them from it, with the enthusiasm they had first shewn him. A few whispers amongst the people were all that even Giovacchino and the more respected of the clergy found it safe to hazard. These, it is true, produced some effect, and prepared men's minds to reconsider what they had done on the impulse of the moment. So much, indeed, did they effect, that the leaders of the revolutionists, Count Tancred, Policastro, and Sanseverino, per-

ceived a growing coolness in the people; and, dreading lest it might increase towards them, despatched Richard MacMardagh to Mistretto with the most urgent remonstrances to his lord, and entreaties that he should ride into Palermo without delay and openly show that he had espoused their cause.

It is almost needless to say that the errand of the Irish squire was without effect. The captain of the little garrison of Mistretto had resolved that he would not again expose himself to the anger of the fiery Count of Aquila; that, happen what might, he would not again lend an ear to any messenger from the outer world. For greater security, he had even removed the horn from the gate, where it hung to answer the purpose of a modern knocker, in order that the arrival of messengers might not become known to the other

gentles, who seemed less anxious to maintain the new rule of privacy, and who might have urged him to transgress his orders. When, therefore, Richard Mac Mardagh pulled in his foaming steed at the bars of the castle, and, hastily hailing the guard, announced his name and quality and claimed to be admitted to his lord, the officer, remembering the terms in which he had been characterized the night before, sulkily stepped towards him.

"Cease your clamour, sir squire," he said. "My orders are to admit a firebrand into a straw-stack sooner than to admit you into this castle. Cease your clamour and go your ways,"

"The day shall come when you shall suffer for this, master," retorted the Irishman. "Meanwhile, although it is not the wont of my countrymen to do so, I will postpone my private quarrel to the public

good. I say, then, that I have messages from Counts Tancred and Sanseverino, and all of them, to my Lord; and that I must have speech with him forthwith."

"And I say," retorted the officer, "that if you had messages from the holy father at Rome and the emperor at Constantinople, you should not pass these bars. And I say, moreover, that if your valour does not turn tail this minute, I will have a bolt sent through your black jerkin."

So saying, he beckoned an archer to where he stood: and bidding him hold his cross-bow in readiness, he withdrew into the guard-room.

In vain did Richard MacMardagh appeal to the soldier. The latter told him that he knew his commander's mood, and must of a truth obey the order he had received.

"In the hamlet hard by," he said, "you will find a woman and a trooper who came

on the same errand last night. The saints prosper you: for I advise you to seek them out without delay."

Slowly Richard MacMardagh rode away; muttering curses on all Italians, whose conduct he declared to be ever contradictory and unintelligible. Even his lord did not escape his censure. The Lady Clemence, whose special champion he had considered himself since her escape from the Favara, was alone spared.

The next day dawned over Palermo, and the clergy had now surely ascertained that the Baron of Taverna was not amongst the conspirators who had dethroned their king. A sudden thought came across the eccentric brain of the monk Giovacchino. He mounted a stool in the market-place, and declared to the people who flocked to it as if resuming their usual habits, that their favourite,

Taverna, was not one of the revolutionists: that he was not amongst them because he disapproved their treason. At the same time, the Elect of Syracuse, the Archbishop of Messina, and the Bishop of Mazzara appealed to the people from the different churches, and called upon them to rescue their sovereign from the base captivity in which he was held. "Is it right, is it decent, is it worthy of Sicilians," they asked, "that your king should be so basely used, that your city should be pillaged by an unruly mob, and that those treasures which your good lord had collected for the defence of the kingdom, should be squandered away by rioters without your consent?"

Gratitude to the Norman Counts who had freed them from the yoke of the Saracens, had ever made the Sicilian people feel an unusual devotion to their

immediate descendants; and these appeals to their truth were not heard by unmoved audiences; but when he whom they believed to be divinely inspired, when Giovacchino in the market-place repeated the same stirring language and accompanied it with an assurance that the plot was disapproved by their favourite Taverna,—he was listened to as to the voice of an oracle. With sudden fury they rushed to arms: the Saracens, instigated by Abderachman, joined in their cries; and the whole population of the city gathered tumultuously around the palace of the Alcazar and fiercely insisted upon the immediate release of the sovereign whom, but three days before, they had helped to dethrone and imprison with every demonstration of indignity!*

* Hugo Falcandus.

Bewildered by this sudden change in the popular feeling, the hitherto-triumphant conspirators were all unprepared to meet resistance from a quarter whence they had so lately received enthusiastic support. Nor were their difficulties decreased by the absence of several of the most eminent amongst them. Count Tancred and many of the principal knights had rode out, with the first blush of daylight, to seek our hero at Mistretto, and to induce him to come to the scene of action, where his presence was so much needed. They had marked the growing indifference of the multitude: and having promised that the young king, Ruggiero, should be crowned so soon as Taverna joined them, they wished to hasten the ceremony in the hope that it would bring over such waverers as stood out against the new order of things. Prince Sanseverino, Simon of Policastro, the Count

of Lesina, and others, did, however, all that bravery could do to resist the sudden attack of the angry multitude. The palace gates were hastily closed and fortified; and troops were placed at every point where they could serve most effectively. An irregular assault was made; and was speedily repulsed by the disciplined valour of the troops. But the rabble soon rallied again, and more warily returned towards the walls. The tall and really commanding figure of Abderachman appeared at the head of a strong body of Saracen citizens: he marshalled their forces with military skill, and advised the disorderly multitude of Sicilians how to form their ranks, and where and when to make the next onset. Again they were repulsed; but not until after a severe struggle. Some of the besiegers had even gained the rampart; and the iron strength of the Count of

Lesina had alone saved the Alcazar, by casting off the scaling ladders from the walls.

The people were repulsed; but they were not intimidated; and it was evident to the leaders that they could not long hold out the palace. More and more fierce became the cries of the assailants, insisting on the liberation of their king; and the followers of the conspirators gave signs that they would not long contend against what seemed to be the unanimous voice of their countrymen. Troops will never fight long against their fellow-citizens united in whatsoever cause. The leaders of the conspiracy sought the room in which the royal family were anxious listeners to the uproar. They could not divine its cause—for the windows of their prison-cell looked upon an inner court of the palace.

"I will never consent to it!" cried the

Count of Lesina as they entered the presence: (he was continuing some expostulation which he had before commenced.) "I will never consent to letting him loose upon us. Had my advice been taken, had he been slain when we first overpowered him, the rabble could not now have been clamouring for his release. Let me now at least have my way. Cast out his dead body on the Cassaro, and let them make what they can of it."

"Count, you know not that we are in the hearing of the king," said Simon of Policastro. "Brother," he continued, "you hear one spirit that urges our counsels. But I and others had stipulated that your life should not be attempted. It shall be safe even now, if you will secure our unmolested retreat from the palace."

"I would not harm thee, Simon: I forgive ye every one!" exclaimed the king

with a readiness that seemed too great to be easily believed by his revolted barons.

"Thanks, my lord," interposed Sanseverino: "nor would we harm you. I say frankly that I know not whether we can hold out the Rocca: but you are now in our power: you hear the advice of some among us: swear that you will endeavour to secure our safe retreat, and we will leave you, at once, to your loving subjects."

"I swear it readily, messires," replied the king:—"but not for the love of life. What has chanced to my poor dear boy has weaned me from life and from the throne. I ask but to end my days in a cloister—in penance and in prayer. But I promise to do my best to secure your safety. You may trust me, on the honour of a Norman."

Undeterred by the warnings of Lesina

and of the Count Bovense, Sanseverino and Policastro led the captive sovereign to a front window of the palace, and exhibited him to the raging crowds who were just then preparing to make a third assault upon the walls.

"Sicilians, here is your king!" cried Simon of Policastro. "We show him to you to convince you of his well-being. Be assured that he will be uninjured by us."

"Shame!" "Shame!" "Unbind him!" "Release him!" cried a thousand angry voices.

"On, comrades!" cried Abderachman to his band. "On! once more and the palace is ours!"

"In the name of San Gennaro and of loyalty, I bid ye push on, brave Sicilians, and rescue your king from the hands of traitors!" exclaimed the monk Giovacchino wildly waving on the multitudes around him.

Again they all rushed forwards; and to the cries of "Evviva King William for ever!" they were about to storm those walls which they had conquered but three days before to the sound of shrieks of execration against the same sovereign! King William waved his hand, and with a beseeching voice and gesture imposed silence on the multitude.

"My children," he cried, "you see that I am safe and well."

"Shame!" "Shame!" the mob again exclaimed. "Shame that a good king should have been so ill used. Death to the traitors!"

And again they rushed forwards to force the great gates and wreak their vengeance upon the counts.

But William seemed to be really actuated by good faith towards his late captors. He drew himself up to the full

height of his noble figure; and assumed the bearing for which he had been formerly celebrated on the field of battle.

"Halt!" he cried in a voice of command. "Halt, and obey your king! Again I tell ye, good people, that I am safe and well. I thank you for your love, but I have promised the noble counts that they shall pass unmolested from the Rocca and from Palermo. Withdraw then, all of ye, to the left side of the Cassaro and let them march out in order. Now, monseigneur of Sanseverino, now, Conte of Lesina, collect your men, and heaven speed ye while ye are faithful subjects, as I trust ye will have cause to continue."

Muttering an undergrowl of suspicion, Lesina turned him from the king; Sanseverino and Policastro hesitated a few moments whether they should make any reply to William's last address; but unwilling to

offer apologies for the past or to give pledges for the future, they, at length, followed the lesser Barons. The retainers of all were soon marshalled in the court of the palace: the gates were then flung open: and not a single rioter encumbered that side of the square through which they had to pass. Armed from head to heel, they marched forth, a compact and disciplined body of men at arms: more terrible in the eyes of many than they would have been had they been mounted on those heavy Norman war-horses which had at first so intimidated the people of the East. The opposing multitudes on the other side of the square were little encouraged by their aspect to break the orders of their sovereign by raising a hand against them. On the contrary, a feeling of regret came over many, as they saw those whom they had long considered their friends and protectors,

driven forth at their own instigation; and felt that they had given themselves up willingly to the passions of a brutal ruler. It was, however, now too late to consider of the past: and the expression of King William's face was so humble, so sorrowful, so different from that which they had seen it wear of late years, that they hoped the danger he had escaped would really warn him from those tyrannous courses that had urged them to rebellion.

While all this was going on in Palermo, our friends at Mistretto had begun the day with a somewhat sad feeling. The short "honeymoon" for which dell' Aquila had stipulated was at an end: and they all felt that those events which it had been intended that their marriage should precipitate, must now call off the bridegrooms to deeds of danger, and must consign the ladies to the safeguard of their husbands'

castles as their only protection against the king's wrath.

"However," exclaimed the Baron of Taverna, rising from the breakfast table and replying rather to the feelings of all than to anything that had been expressed; "However, I must forth and see how the world goes on. Ruggiero, thou wilt doubtless ride with me: thou wert not wont to be a carpet-knight. Fair ladies, I advise you to have all in readiness to move to my castle of Cacabo at short notice. It is stronger than this; and there be many reasons wherefore we should not longer tax the hospitality of our good uncle, Tommaso. Farewell, sweet Clemence; farewell, lady Agata."

Let it be supposed that the adieux were made with every demonstration of affection on the part of all: with brave gallantry on that of the knights; with timid forebodings

on that of Agata; and with gay but steady determination on that of our heroine.

"We have thought of all this before, Agata dear," she said. "We have wed to escape from danger, and with a full knowledge of the dangers we incurred by doing so. We have acted for the best. Let us leave the event to heaven and to the prowess and devotion of our knights. So coraggio, dear girl! Let us to the battlement to see them go forth."

The two nobles had sallied from the gate; and, followed by a small but sturdy escort, they rode briskly down the hill side in search of intelligence. They had advanced but a short distance, when they met Count Tancred and his party spurring towards Mistretto, in order, as we have heard, to break through the strange seclusion of our hero, and to bring him to

Palermo to sanction the revolution by his presence. Brief explanation sufficed to make known what had happened, as far as it was then known to Tancred; and dell' Aquila, with some feeling of shame, confessed how his own strict orders had necessarily kept them ignorant of the revolution and of all connected with it.

"One of your mad pranks, Conte dell' Aquila!" exclaimed Tancred sadly. "However," he added, "I pray heaven that we may arrive in time."

They set spurs to their horses and galloped back towards Palermo.

But they did not arrive in time. A mile from the gate of Sant' Agata, they met Sanseverino, at the head of the late triumphant conspirators, retreating crestfallen from the scene of their short-lived success. Soon was the extent of their failure made known; and sad were the forebodings of many.

"It is an unlucky chance!" said our hero; "but, messires, let us not be cast down. Our first *coup de main* has failed: that is all. I deeply regret that I was not in it: but this only binds me still more to our cause. Ride with me all to my castle of Cacabo. There let us rally our forces: there let us concert plans for the future. We are still the knighthood of a kingdom in arms against a tyrant and his base rabble. When was fortune fickle to the standard of Norman knighthood?"

CHAPTER III.

"If I were mad, I should forget my son,
Or madly think a babe of clouts were he:
I am not mad: too well, too well I feel
The different plague of each calamity."

King John.

Great joy was in the palace of Palermo when now the city was evacuated by the rebel barons, and King William was again at liberty and sovereign lord. The Gaieto Pietro and the other Saracen eunuchs thronged around him; and exclamations of triumph and demands for vengeance re-echoed on every side. Friends who had been faithful during the three days of adversity, now came and boasted of their fidelity; and those who had held aloof, awaiting the course of events, boasted still

louder than they. Queen Margaret heard them all in stern silence, where she sat on a low stool, her face buried in her hands; but when, at length, the great chamberlain, Pietro, turned to her, and in a boastful tone continued some words of triumph and congratulation, which he had been addressing to the king, she started suddenly to her feet, and all the woman and the mother flashed from her angry eyes.

"Peace, slave!" she cried: "and cease your congratulations, messires," she exclaimed to the clergy who had gathered around; "cease your congratulations to the tyrant, to the monster whom you adulate. Look here," she cried, snatching an ample cloak from something it was spread over on a couch beside her, and discovering the corpse of little Roger,—"look here on the body of the sweetest child that ever mother bore. There he lies, poor, dear, innocent

child;—there he lies, done to death by his savage father. Aye, start, my lord of Syracuse, but it is true! These eyes saw that cruel, cruel brute kick the sweet child to death, as he ran up to complain of the traitors who had made him king, and prayed his mother to stanch the blood from this ghastly wound. But it was not this wound that killed it: this arrow-wound was inflicted by a harmless, by a friendly hand, compared with that of his own unnatural father. And spurned with a kick! done to death by a kick, like a venomous reptile!....Oh, Roger, Roger, mine only darling!" she cried as she threw herself passionately upon the body, and again and again kissed the cold and now discoloured lips of the once beautiful boy; "and must I resign thee for ever to the angels, of whom thou didst seem one to my fond eyes? And must I behold thee no more?"

she cried, as she drew back her head and marked the signs of approaching dissolution. "Farewell! farewell! my sweet one! Take him away! take him away! his image is in my heart; and, waking or sleeping, I can never forget him, nor who it was who brought him to this wretched pass!"

She cast the cloak over the body, and, with a look of wild energy, again started to her feet.

"Brute! monster! tyrant!" she cried, shaking her clenched hand towards her husband; "well might the barons of thy kingdom call thee by such names! Oh, wretched murderer of thine innocent boy"...

She stood suddenly in the midst of her passion, as one palsied in a full career of frenzy: she stayed the outburst of her wrath, and looked into the face of her husband. Her bosom heaved painfully: tears streamed from her eyes, and broken

sobs almost choked her as she leaned forward and peered into the dull, hopeless, unmeaning face of him whom she would have crushed beneath her anger.

"William!" she exclaimed at length; "for God's sake, William, speak! thou dost frighten me! Do not look with such a ghastly no-meaning! Blame me! strike me! only show that thou dost feel something!"

But, heavy and apathetic, king William stood before her. Tears silently welled from his large blue eyes, and stood upon his flushed cheek: he rocked himself from side to side; and at length, burying his face in his hands, he leaned his head against an angle of the little apartment and groaned aloud.

"William!" said Queen Margaret, following him and laying her hand on his shoulder, "forgive me that I spoke so

harshly. I know that thou didst it in anger. I know that thou art as sorry for it as I am. The sight of our friends here renewed my grief—speak to me and forgive me."

King William turned; and throwing his arms around his wife, hid his face on her shoulder.

"Oh, Margaret, we are both miserable!" he murmured amid convulsive sobs.

For some minutes they stood thus locked in each other's arms. The king then quietly disengaged himself from his wife, and, turning aside, began to move gloomily up and down the little apartment.

The Bishop Elect of Syracuse went up to him; and laying a hand upon his arm, stayed his unsteady walk, and besought him to think how much the unsettled affairs of his kingdom required his energy and immediate care.

"I heed them not, father," he said. "No more kingdoms for me! Sackcloth and ashes and penance alone become me. I am unworthy to herd with men; never more will I speak of governing them."

The Saracen, Gaieto Pietro, approached and added his remonstrance to those of the English Bishop.

"Begone, sirrah!" said the king, but in an unmoved tone of voice and with a lack-lustre eye; "thou wert wont to fawn upon my evil passions: thou hast helped to bring me to this."

"I have given a brother in the service of your grace," said the Saracen; "he was one of the first who fell when the rebels stormed the palace."

"Would to heaven that he had been the last!" exclaimed the king. "Begone, messires, begone," he added fretfully, "you weary me; you are no longer my officers,

and I will be no longer your king. Dismiss the guards and let who will command. To the foul fiend with the kingdom, and with all that belongs to it!"

With an angry gesture, he waved them from the room; and then sank down upon the couch beside the body of his child, and again buried his face in his hands.

Hours passed away and still he moved not from his place. A fixed despair seemed to have succeeded to his usual dull lethargic habit. Clergy and knights and Saracens were allowed to accost him; all, in turn, endeavoured to arouse him; all, in turn, told him of the necessities of the state, and all, in turn, were dismissed with gentle words that betrayed a hopeless indifference to all things. The day wore on, and now a solemn chaunt was heard approaching the sad room where lay the slaughtered child and the apparently heart-

broken father. Preparations had been hastily made for the interment of the little victim of paternal jealousy: and priest and cross-bearer approached the room. The chant was solemn yet hopeful: "May the name of the Lord be blessed now and for evermore," sang the clergy clothed in spotless white, while they sprinkled the little body with holy water.

"Praise the Lord, ye children, praise ye the name of the Lord," continued the holy ministers.

"Be not so cast down, my liege," whispered the Elect of Syracuse to the king; "this hopeful service should speak peace to your sorrow. Listen to its cheering words."

"Thou hast received me on account of mine innocence; and thou hast settled me in thy sight for ever," chanted the priest.

"Youths and virgins, old men and young, praise ye the name of the Lord," continued another celebrant.

The king shook his head mournfully.

"Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," exclaimed the bishop of Syracuse, joining in the service.

The tears of the king flowed fast; nor did he strive to conceal them.

"Join, at all events, in the prayer, my liege," said the bishop kindly; and then, looking over the book of the other clergy, he himself read out:

"Oh, almighty and everlasting God, thou lover of holy purity, who in thy mercy hast deigned to call the soul of this child to thyself, vouchsafe, through the merits of thy sacred passion and the intercession of blessed Mary and of all thy saints, that we also may rejoice with

all thine elect in the same kingdom for ever."

He dipped a sprig of myrtle into the holy water and handed it to the king.

"Bless thee, my child," said the king, sprinkling it with nervous trepidation over the body; "bless thee; and pray that God would forgive thy wretched father."

He fell on his knees beside the couch on which the body lay. The bishop made a sign to the assistants not to disturb him; and quietly raising the body, they bore it from the room amid the continued hymns of jubilee and hope which the ritual prescribed.

That day and the next faded slowly away; and still king William indulged the same hopeless grief, and refused to be comforted. A man of strong passions at all times, when once he was fairly aroused from his lethargic nature, nothing

could check the energy of his active feelings, whether based upon emotions of revenge (as was most frequently the case) or of self-accusation such as he now gave way to. The palace gates were open to all intruders, to whom he bitterly bewailed his affliction; and many were those who waited upon him with the object of discovering whether the mind of the king was really distraught with grief, as people said it was, while they professed to be only anxious to urge him to give his care to the state of the common weal. The clergy tried to arouse him by precepts of religion, and failed: Queen Margaret attempted to do so by bringing to him his other son, little William, with the hope that the guileless child might move him. The father at first eagerly opened his arms to the child; then suddenly turned away with an expression of loathing and self-

reproach. The city began to be in a fearful state of excitement. Taverna, Sanseverino and the rebel Counts were assembling at Cacabo. Another attack was dreaded.

The Saracen chamberlain, the Gaieto Pietro, walked boldly into the royal presence.

"I marvel, your grace", he said, "can be so mean-spirited as not to avenge the death of your eldest son! By the holy prophet, had we known what stuff these Normans were made of, they should not so easily have won from us this fair island! While you sit moping here like a Greek slave, there be the Counts who have slain your son triumphing over his death at Cacabo, and proposing to send your grace to a cloister as more suited to your temperament than a throne."

"The Counts who have slain—who have

slain him? sayest thou?" asked the king eagerly. "How meanest thou?"

"I mean, my lord, that I have no doubt it was they who shot him with the arrow which I believe to have been the cause of his death; at all events, if they had been dutiful subjects, all these evils never could have chanced. They, therefore, are guilty of the death of the dear child; and people say that it behoves his father's honour to avenge him."

King William started to his feet.

"And he shall be revenged!" he cried. "By the holy face of Lucca, he shall be avenged, and that right speedily!"

He paced furiously up and down the small room. His eyes glared with concentrated fire. He had the bearing of a caged wild beast, meditating how to make its fatal spring. This continued for a quarter of an hour. The Saracen saw that the

spirit he had wished to call up was busy within him, and watched him in silent satisfaction. Anon, a softer mood came over the mind of the king, and showed itself in his more gentle paces, in his more thoughtful and downcast glance. At length he spoke.

"Gaieto," he said, "have the people summoned into the great hall: they have had some cause to complain: at all events, they must be conciliated. Summon them instantly, while I attire myself to meet them."

Fearful lest any delay might bring renewed infirmity, the chamberlain hastened to give the requisite orders. Soon the great bell of the neighbouring church again tolled forth its startling summons; and heralds' messengers in every quarter of Palermo summoned the people to meet their king in the great hall of the Alcazar. They congregated quickly; and within an

hour, King William descended to meet them. He had refused to wear his robes of royalty, as unsuited to his state of mourning; and was dressed only in a loose robe, beneath which the leather jerkin of the warrior was allowed to peep out with some art. His ministers were around him, together with the few barons who still adhered to his fortunes. He took his place at the upper end of the hall; and shouts of enthusiastic greeting assured him of the unchanging love of the fickle multitude. The shattered nerves of the king could not bear him up under the excitement of the scene. He bowed his head upon his knees where he sat in the chair of state, and wept like a child. Renewed cheers encouraged him, and the Bishop of Syracuse whispered words of comfort. Trembling and agitated he arose.

"Good friends and faithful people," he

said, "I blush not that you see me deeply moved. He whom God hath chastised, should not stand erect beneath His saving scourge. But while He afflicted me, your devotion was the more deeply touching. You clung to me—you delivered me from the hands of evil-doers. Yet let me not accuse them rashly. You have all had much to complain of. I feel that my government has been harsh and at times inconsiderate. The King of heaven punished me. He chastised my pride by raising up rebels against me."

"Long live the king!" interposed the cheers of the multitude.

"Thanks, a thousand thanks for your love!" resumed the sovereign. "It shall not go unrewarded. There are charges and taxes which press hard upon you. From this instant they are all repealed."

"King William for ever! Evviva our

legitimate, our generous king!" cried the people.

"As far as in me lies," resumed the king, "I will do my devoir as a knight and as a just ruler. My only object will be to regain your love."

"It is ever yours, my lord!" "It has never wavered!" cried several voices.

"Would," continued the king, "would that I could as easily appease my own conscience and recall the dreadful affliction—"

His emotion prevented him from continuing, for some seconds.

"Would," he resumed, "would that I could as easily satisfy my own conscience, and restore what my blind passion has destroyed for ever! Pray for me, my friends. Pray for my dear lost son—"

"Long live little Ruggiero! Long live the king's son, the Duke of Apulia!" cried

the multitude, ignorant that the poor child had been two days dead. The shock which this outburst gave to the excited sensibilities of the father, was more than he could endure. He stood awhile speechless and horror-stricken: then smiting his forehead with his broad hand, he rushed through a door at the back of the throne, and staggered to his apartment.

The Elect of Syracuse took up the broken thread of his discourse; and, in eloquent language, explained to the people that the poor child, for whom they invoked a long life, had been slain during the riots. He justified to them the grief of its father: and, in the name of that father, he assured them that the grievances of which they had complained should be removed, and that nothing should be left undone to knit, in bonds of lasting friendliness, the king and his people. He promised the repeal of

several obnoxious taxes; and granted several privileges that had been long demanded in vain by the people of Palermo.

Such concessions, so unexpectedly bestowed, produced the desired effect. King William was again the idol of the people: and deep and heartfelt were the congratulations with which they poured from the hall of audience and spread his praises throughout the city and island.

We have ill-pourtrayed King William's character, if the reader deem that his present repentant mood was likely to be of permanent duration. Violent when stirred by any great occasion, his good feelings, like his more active energies, soon evaporated when the occasion, which had called them forth, had passed away. Sloth and revenge were the only lasting qualities of his mind: and after every outburst of bet-

ter feeling, one or the other of these would, full soon, reassert its empire over him. The day of the conference with his people passed away, and left him still steeped in the outward show of grief. But the desire for vengeance, called up by the Saracen chamberlain, was, even then, working within him: it acquired strength throughout the night; and the following morning exhibited him only as the active, ready and decided leader which, in his early youth, he had so often shown himself on the field of battle and in many a trying circumstance. The day had not yet reached its meridian, when the rebel barons assembled at Cacabo—Taverna, Sanseverino, Tancred, Policastro, Aquila, Lesina, and others—when all those who had been most active in the late rebellion, and who had congregated under our hero's roof to determine on the next step in their enterprise,

were startled by the summons of an envoy, sent to them by the king, to demand the cause of their unwonted gathering. The message was addressed to the Baron of Taverna; and implied that much the king marvelled that one who had not appeared in the rebellion himself, should harbour men whose hostile intentions could not be doubted.

"My lot is cast with that of my noble friends," replied our hero, when, at the head of the other barons, he had received the message of the herald. "Tell the king that my lot is cast with theirs: and that if he would live in peace and friendship with us all, he must do justice and observe the old constitutions of the state. Return, MacMardagh," he said to his Irish squire, "return with the herald; as thou didst save the tyrant's life, he will respect thine as it were that of a herald. Tell King

William that these noble barons will not submit to the tyranny he has laid upon the country: that they will not allow him to forbid the marriage of their daughters until, for want of heirs, the whole territory relapse, fief after fief, to the crown: tell him that they require him to repeal all his new laws which trench upon the liberty of the people, and restore those and those only that were established by his grandfather, Roger, and by the still more famous Robert Guiscard. If he will do this, we are ready to live with him in peace and amity: if he will not do it, we are ready to make him.* Said I well, friends?" he asked, turning to the nobles around him.

A sound of dagger-hilts striking upon the board of the table around which they

* Giannone.

stood, testified the assent of the barons: and half an hour afterwards, Richard Mac Mardagh returned with the envoy towards the palace of Palermo.

CHAPTER IV.

"Arma virumque cano."
Virgil.

King William was in that octagon room of the palace which we have often mentioned. He was in deep consultation with the Elect of Syracuse, the Great Chamberlain, and the new High Admiral, when the herald returned from Cacabo and was ushered into his presence together with the Irish squire. He turned him abruptly to the former and required the answer sent by the barons. It was repeated to him.

"'If he will not, we are ready to make him,' they declare, do they?" he said, repeating the last words of the envoy: but

so help me heaven at my utmost need, if I will not lose kingdom and life, rather than do aught at their bidding!"

He spoke between his teeth, and in a voice so choked by passion as not to be distinctly audible beyond the circle of his counsellors. He then turned him away and rapidly paced the room: his usual practice when excited. Gradually his anger cooled down—for his steps became slower and more measured, and what seemed the reflection of a sarcastic smile played, at times, around his heavy mouth. He stood still at length; and, gazing on the Irishman, exclaimed—

"By the holy face of Lucca, my preserver from the traitors! Who and what art thou, man?"

"An Irishman, my lord; a follower of the Baron of Taverna," replied Mac-Mardagh.

"A follower of the king, good youth, an it please thee," answered William kindly. "Thou hast saved my life when none other was there to strike a blow for it. I marked thy gallant bearing: and I charge myself with thy fortunes. Who art thou? What is thine estate?"

"The son of a small Irish chieftain, whom the misfortunes of his country have driven forth until heaven enable him to return and serve her."

"Never think of returning, man, to a poor country," said the king with the spirit of a successful adventurer. "The country of a knight is there where his sword has carved out his fortunes. Art thou a knight?"

"I have not as yet done aught to deserve that honour," replied Richard modestly.

"So thou dost not rank at much worth the saving the life of a Norman king from

an armed mob of savage barons! Thou shalt be a knight to-morrow, and have such other grace as William of Hauteville and his kingdom can show thee. See to it, my lord of Syracuse. He is a countryman of your reverence, at all events the King of England wishes to make him so—and I therefore request you to charge yourself with giving all needful directions. I will myself knight him to-morrow. Wherefore is it, I marvel, that strangers are so much more trustworthy than one's own subjects—unless it be the faithful few whom nothing can corrupt?" he added, stretching a hand frankly to each of the two other counsellors who might have been hurt by his speech. "Now, my lord of Syracuse, take away this young man, I pray you; and give all needful orders to arm and equip him as one whom the king would honour."

Having thus got rid of the English

Bishop of Syracuse, before whom he felt unwilling to unfold the system of treachery upon which he had mentally resolved after receiving the reply of the herald, the king rubbed his large hands joyfully together, and again addressed him to the envoy.

"Take a fresh horse, sir herald," he said, "and fear not to ruffle your tabard by overspeed. Ride back to the barons, and say that we confess the justice of their demands: that we would treat with them face to face as friends, rather than by the intervention of hostile messages; and that we crave them to send forthwith some of their number to consult with us on all matters that need reformation. Suggest to them that the Lord of Taverna should himself meet us; or, if he considers himself a principal among the contracting parties (having lately broken the law he deems so obnoxious, by marrying without our con-

sent), let the Lord of Sanseverino, who is also interested in the matter, in virtue of his sister's marriage, come and draw up a charter of peace for himself and his compeers. Say that our people are disquieted by this state of unnatural and unseemly suspicion; and that we would restore harmony to the kingdom as soon as possible."

The evening was far advanced when the elect of Syracuse, accompanied by Richard MacMardagh, ascended the great stairs of the palace, and passed along the open corridor which ran round the third story, conducting to all the principal apartments and to the royal chapel. It occupied one side of the inner court, and was built above the prisons and other offices of Norman rule. They entered it in silence: and a feeling of religious awe and knightly enthusiasm came over the youth as he trod within the holy precincts and saw the dim lights upon

the altar before which he was to watch his knightly arms.

"May saint Patrick and the other saints of Ireland protect thee, good youth," said the bishop taking leave of him with kindness. "Thou hast apparently begun life under their auspices, if all I hear of thy faith and gallantry be true. My good word shall back the favour which the king has resolved to show thee: for I am proud to see foreign lords place more reliance in English and Irish wanderers than in their native subjects. The feeling of a knight seems to be born in thee: ask the prayers of the saints that thou mayest be ever directed how to carry it out."

The Irishman respectfully raised to his lips the hand of the prelate, and accompanied him back to the door in silence. Then, with a strange blended feeling of mysterious dread and hope, he walked up

the centre nave, and knelt on the topmost step leading to the choir. He knelt before the lighted altar, and bowed his head on the marble pavement, that he might not see the arms that were laid on the floor beside him. Fervently he tried to pray, and even not to think of them: but the effort was beyond his young ambition, and after a while he devoutly made the holy sign of the cross on his chest; rose and turned towards them, and then repeated it with enthusiastic fervour above the glittering heap. There then was the panoply which he had so often sighed to wear! There were the badges of honour which, not many weeks ago, he had refused to receive at the hands of his own patron, because he did not deem the occasion on which they were offered worthy of so high a reward: there they now lay, presented to him by one of the most powerful kings of

Europe, whose life, however unworthy, his single arm had saved from the fury of his own subjects! It was, indeed, a glorious feat for one so young, so unfriended and unknown, to have accomplished; and he felt that it would enable him, with proud self-satisfaction, to take his place in what were then the only ranks of honour and renown.

Long and delightedly he gazed at and examined the glittering pile. He was sorely tempted to remove it, and look into every article piece by piece; but respect for the altar before which he stood, withheld him. He restrained his curiosity, and at length mastered it sufficiently to enable himself again to return to his devotions on the steps. He fervently thanked the God who had protected him so far; and offered his life, his hopes, and his arms, to the honour and service of heaven and of the church.

With a somewhat sobered feeling he arose from his knees, and examined the noble building above and around him. It was in the form of a large church, with nave and aisles and three apses: and curiously it exhibited, and to this day exhibits, the varied characteristics of art to which its founder, the father of the present king, had been compelled to have recourse. Greek, Arabian, and Latin, had all blended their several tastes in its construction: and the pillars of marble and of granite, the plunder of some ancient pagan temples, carried back the mind, even of Richard MacMardagh, to a still earlier period.

The lights on the altar and in the sanctuary, cast but a doubtful glimmer over the more remote parts of the chapel: and the blue wintry sky shone bright and cheering through the few short lancet windows that broke the side wall of the building. Earnestly the poor Irish adventurer looked

up at those brilliant stars; and leaning his shoulder against one of the massive pillars of the aisle, allowed his mind to wander back to distant lands where he had first seen those everlasting heavenly beacons. How fondly he thought of his beloved native country, of her green fields, her rivers and her moors—of all whom he had loved there and by whom he had been beloved, ere English lust of conquest and papal treachery had brought war and division and desolation where holiness and learning and chivalry had been, hand in hand, leading the way to civilization and to peace! He thought of the blessed hopes of his childhood and of the ruin with which the soldiers of the English Henry had overcast them ere manhood had darkened his cheeks: and if he prized the rank that was about to be bestowed upon him, he remembered, with

a proud consciousness of power, that it might enable him hereafter to serve his country and to prove that he entertained for it a lasting affection which no personal success could ever make him forget.

He drew himself up to his full height, and, with something of pride, began to pace the gloomy church. The lamps in the sanctuary occasionally threw up a fitful flame that streamed gorgeously on the golden mosaic-work with which one side of the temple was already covered. Scaffolding encumbered the rest of the wall; for it was a long and tedious work to place together those glittering gem-like particles with which the whole building was to be encrusted. He raised his eyes to the massive roof of wood; and sinking upon a bench, strained them to arrange in harmony the glowing Saracenic ornaments that covered it, and to trace intelligible

letters in the Cuphic characters inscribed amongst them. Strangely bewildering were the recollections which these Saracenic associations in a Christian church brought to the mind of one who, in his own country, had only heard of Mahometans as of pagans against whom it behoved every devout Christian to assume the cross of the Crusaders. He read and reread the shapes of the letters, till they blended confusedly before his eyes with the roses carved on the roof, the stars gleaming through the window and the rich mosaic of the golden walls. Duke Roger's clock tolled a lengthened hour from the place where it was fixed outside the chapel wall. He marvelled that the night was so much advanced; and while he was yet counting the strokes, he dropped off into a slumber that was but faintly tinged with dreams of the favour he had acquired with the king,

and of the honour that awaited him on the morrow.*

That morrow, however, came full soon; and while the senses of the young Irish squire were still steeped in forgetfulness, Count Sanseverino sprang to horse in the castle of Cacabo, and set forth to attend the invitation of the king's herald. The assembled barons had suggested doubts of the sincerity of the friendly dispositions expressed by the king, and warned him not to trust himself in Palermo. But Sanseverino had been the only one who had witnessed the unhappy blow that had felled the royal child almost in his arms: he had understood the deep grief that had prompted William afterwards to address them in such an altered manner; and he would not

* This chapel still exists as we have described it—unchanged by the centuries that have passed since it arose, the first specimen of Norman art in Sicily.

doubt the sincerity of a conversion expressed so soon after such a bereavement. "Besides," he replied to the remonstrances of his friends, "I feel personally called upon to act in this matter. I approved dell' Aquila's union with my sister in the hope of bringing on a crisis. I must not now shrink from a risk that may secure the objects which we all of us had in view."

"According to that showing, I surely ought to accompany thee!" exclaimed the Baron of Taverna; and he ordered his horses to be brought forth.

"Not so, Matteo," replied Sanseverino: and the others joined in representing to him that he was the principal in the matter which had to be debated, and should not, therefore, appear in person: that he was the leader to whose guidance they all looked up; finally, that he was their host; and that they would not allow him to run into

danger while they were safely sheltered within his castle. Sanseverino was, however, persuaded to double the escort he had intended to take with him: and then making light of the fears of his friends, he leapt into the saddle and went gallantly from the gateway of the fortress.

It was a beautiful morning on that bright wintry day; and light and cheerful within him was the heart of the noble Norman as he rode adown the mountain tracks towards the city. The air was pure and elastic, as it ever is in that favoured region. The sun glanced brightly over rock and wood. Evergreen shrubs of myrtle and arbutus sprang from every crevice: and wild flowers, of hues and delicacy such as the choicest northern gardeners had not then even imagined, enameled the fragrant turf, and peeped up through the withered leaves of the

forest. As he descended towards the plain, vegetation was still more apparent. The fields already bore green promise of summer: groves of orange and lemon trees sparkled in the broad sunshine: the lark—that sweet image of a pious soul that

"Sings as she soars and trembles as she sings"—

the lark sprang blithely from some unseen nook in the earth, and, poised upon its quivering wings, rose higher and higher, till faintly-modulated twitterings alone guided the eye to the tiny trembling speck that seemed to be fading into the blue ether overhead. But the full-voiced thrushes in the hedge-rows took up the song: and the bright sea in the distance, blended with the heavens above—as blue, as still, and, apparently, as boundless.

Sanseverino's gallant heart was light within him; and cheerfully he murmured his matin orisons and hummed the sweet

Sicilian hymn to the Blessed Virgin, as if he sympathized in the joyousness of all living and inanimate nature about him.

He summoned his followers to close their ranks behind him as he passed beneath the deep-browed portal of Santa Agata. The streets wore their every-day appearance, of bustling, but armed, commerce; and nothing particular caught his eye as he slowly rode across the wide square of the Cassaro and approached the palace.

He passed the draw-bridge, his retainers at his back, in serried ranks. He passed through the arch-way, and stepped into the inner court: — the portcullis fell behind him with a heavy clang; and a groan of agony proclaimed that it had crushed, as it fell, one of the men-at-arms in his rear.

"Ha! cowardly tyrant!" exclaimed the count, reining in his steed and looking

behind him. Only two troopers had entered, following him, ere the portcullis fell.

"Lay down your arms, mes braves!" he cried to them. "You can do nothing here. Let me meet my fate alone."

But even as he spoke, bowstrings twanged from each side of the gate-way: and the poor knaves fell from their horses, wounded by a dozen arrows. They clattered against the hawberk of the count and stuck thickly in his gambaison. He smote his steed with his spurs; and, with a bound, it carried him into the centre of the court, where it fell beneath him, shot with numberless missiles.

"Where art thou, disloyal tyrant!" cried Sanseverino springing to his feet and drawing his sword. "If thou wouldst not be branded as coward no less than traitor, show thyself, and maintain thy quarrel, body to body!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the king in the corridor above, whence he looked down into the court. "How fares your grace? Methinks your friend's regency is a troubled one!"

"Brute!" cried the count shaking his sword in defiance at the monster: then waving it swiftly round, he drove off the men at arms who were pressing upon him on all sides: and retreated swiftly to the further wall of the court. He placed his back firmly against it, and awaited the onset of his assailants.

"On him, boys; on him!" shouted the king from above. "Think that it is a boar hunt; and take your sport joyously but warily."

More than a score of soldiers pressed around the victim, while archers in the distance were only puzzled by the difficulty of so shooting their arrows as not to wound

their own men. But still Sanseverino defended himself bravely; and many an oath escaped the lips of King William as he saw five troopers sink, one after the other, beneath the sword-sweep of the count.

"By the holy face of Lucca, ye are no better than women!" he cried. "The king's favour to him who despatches him!"

As he spoke, a large gaunt figure of a man issued from one of the low galleries in the wall against which the conflict was being carried on. It was the jailor Gavaretto. He crept stealthily along, clinging to the wall as he moved. The king marked him.

"On my men, once more!" he cried to those in front, that they might engross the attention of the victim.

Again they rushed forwards. Gavaretto seized the opportunity: and slipping behind the count, aimed a mighty blow be-

tween his steel-covered gambaison and his leather boots; quick as lightning, he repeated it with consummate art. Sanseverino fell hamstrung to the pavement.

"I will reward that fellow whatever be his crimes!" exclaimed the king to the Gaieto Pietro, who stood beside him. "Hold! hold!" he continued to the men at arms: "Do not kill him. A warrior's death is too good for him. Away with him to the Cassaro and hang him on the highest gibbet. Off with him, I say—by the heels: drag him by the heels! So perish all traitors to the king!"

He spat insultingly down into the yard from the place where he stood; and then, leaning on the shoulder of the Saracen chamberlain, turned into his apartment to breakfast.

An hour afterwards, he was kneeling before the altar in the royal chapel. The

Bishop of Syracuse had rejoined the Irishman early in the morning; and, with the assistance of squires, had clothed him with the body-armour used in those days.* A well quilted hauberk, with breeches and chausses attached, fitted closely to his lithe and graceful limbs, and gave them an appearance of that substance which they would otherwise have wanted to constitute perfect manliness. Its outward lining was of the darkest green silk, stitched through and through in the most choice patterns: and the whole was inlaid and overlaid, or as it was termed "rustred", with bright rings of steel, some three inches in diameter, polished so as to exhibit the finest temper which artificers could bestow upon it in those days.

* We regret that we may not imitate the license of Sir Walter Scott, who bedecks his knights, of about the same period, in plated Milan armour such as was not invented till almost three centuries later.

"I have selected this rather than gold or silver mail," said the bishop, as the youth stood forth in his glittering web: "the king's favour would have given either; but I look forward to rough times: and I think I do not misjudge thee in deeming that thou wouldst prefer that armour which would best enable thee to do thy duty."

"My kind patron!" exclaimed the youth: "may I only be enabled to justify your reverence's good opinion!"

They returned into the chapel, and kneeled at the right hand of the king during the celebration of Mass. The officiating minister implored blessings upon the loose pieces of armour that still lay piled before the altar, and sprinkled them with holy water. The service concluded. Queen Margaret, with her own fair hands, cast a leathern baldric, embroidered with gold, over his shoulder; knights and squires bound the

iron plates, called poleynes, to his knees, and the coveted gilt spurs of knighthood to his heels: and King William, with soldierly frankness, unslung his own sword from his side as he exclaimed, "Kneel down, my man: kneel down, Riccardo Mardano, for such they tell me is thy name."

"MacMardagh, my lord," said the Irishman proudly: "the people here cannot pronounce it: but let me, I pray, receive honour by my own name."

"Kneel then, good youth," said the king: and striking him lightly on the ear and shoulder, he added, "and now rise up, MacMardano: rise up a knight, and do thy devoir in God's name."

With his own hands, he girded the sword around the hips of his new favourite, who was too much moved the while to utter more than half-formed sentences of thanks. They placed on his head a flat

steel helmet, with an évantaille or screen in the newest fashion, to guard his face; and around his neck they slung a large kite-shaped shield, which the heralds had already charged with armorial bearings indicative of the feat to which he owed his knighthood:—argent; three swords gules, beaten down by a machue sable. It bore the scroll, "Salve le roy."

"But this," said MacMardagh, "this is what I have most desired to wield!" and he grasped the heavy lance that was handed to him by the Elect of Syracuse. "I would carry no arms but that of my country until I should be entitled to exchange it for the knight's spear;" and he shook it proudly in his grasp till the little pennoncelle at the top rustled audibly above them.

"Let us go forth," exclaimed the king. "A knight on foot is but half a knight; and these are no times for idleness or joyance."

He led the way into the court-yard, where horses ready caparisoned awaited them. A stout Norman destrier, armed with all the defences then invented, was held by a couple of men-at-arms wearing the new badge of MacMardagh: and two squires kissed his hand as their lord, and held the stirrups while he leapt into the saddle. The king also mounted: nor observed that his feet dabbled in a pool of blood ere he sprang from the pavement. It was not unmarked by the Irishman, who, turning to the Bishop of Syracuse, observed aloud, "Doubtless the blood of the poor wretch with whom we heard the scuffle this morning."

"Aye, aye; come along; come along!" cried the king. "There be more of such wretches, against whom thou mayest try thy prowess."

He rode out to the square of the Cassaro

before the palace, where a large body of troops was already drawn up. Fifty horsemen stood together on one side with their followers, and, at their head, stood one who unfurled a broad pennon marked with bearings which MacMardagh recognized, with joyful surprise, to be similar to those on his own shield. King William rode briskly up to them."

"Friends and good people," he cried aloud, "these are times in which we would have all to know how we reward our friends and our foes."

He took the folds of the silken pennon in his left hand, and drawing his poignard from his belt, cut off the two points; leaving only a square banner.

"This may well be deemed the field of battle," he cried, "since it was within a few yards of this spot that Sieur Ricardo Mardano saved the life of the king from

the onslaught of traitors. These are thine own vassals, good youth," he continued: "and I consider the homage already paid for the fief that will support them."

MacMardagh leapt from his horse, and seizing the king's hand bowed his lips over it.

"Mount again," said William. "And now all of you," he cried, "who have seen how faith is rewarded, see how treachery is punished. Open your ranks, there!"

The men-at-arms on his right hand obeyed the command, and discovered, in the back ground, a gibbet to which hung the body of one in knightly garb.

MacMardagh stared with horror, and moved his horse a few paces nearer to assure himself of the identity of the corpse.

"See your leader in the dethronement of your Sovereign!" cried the king, addressing

the assembled multitudes. "Say; has he not met his deserts?"

With shouts of "Evviva!" and of "Long live our lawful king!" the people responded to this appeal. MacMardagh alone sat, horror-stricken, in his saddle;—unable to give utterance to the disgust and wrath that was boiling within him.

"This," said King William, turning to him, "this was a leader amongst those against whom thy knighthood can best display itself. This very day, we march against his brother rebels."

"With *him*, then, was the conflict I overheard this morning!" the Irishman at length exclaimed. "His is the blood that now dabbles thy boots! Tyrant!" he cried, shaking his lance with frantic energy: "Tyrant, thou hast decoyed him! By foul means, thou hast ensnared and done to death an honourable gentleman. Serve

with *thee* against *his* fellows, sayest thou? By Saint Patrick, it only grieves me that I have taken knighthood from the hands of a murderer!"

During this impetuous outburst, King William listened with a dull smile, first of incredulity and surprise. It soon changed into deadly scorn.

"Thou shalt as soon be unknighted, youngster!" he replied at length. "Bring hither some base slave," he cried, "to hack the spurs from his heels with a bill-hook!"

"Ha!" cried MacMardagh. "Thou art as incapable, tyrant, of conferring dishonour as honour. Friends," he cried to the men-at-arms drawn upon behind his banner: "if ye are my vassals, follow your lord. False king, we meet again!"

He struck his spurs into his steed and dashed past the ranks of the surprised and

stupified troopers, who neither followed nor attempted to stay him.

"After him!" cried the king furiously. "Kill him! Shoot him!"

But the horse and the armour which the Elect of Syracuse had chosen for him, now stood him in good stead. His charger outsped the king's riders that dashed tumultuously after him; and the arrows that were shot against him rattled, glancing from his steel-covered gambaison, or stuck harmlessly in the silk underneath its rings. On, on he dashed; and soon he distanced all his pursuers. He neared the gate of Santa Agata; and a cry was upraised from behind, bidding the warder to close the barriers. On—on dashed Richard Mac Mardagh: and the heavy drawbridge was already rising upon its chains, when the hoofs of his steed clattered heavily on it, and sprang over the yawning fosse beneath.

Some time was lost in dropping it again for the pursuers to pass over; and, after another hour, the Irishman felt that he had leisure to breathe his horse at the foot of the ascent that wound upwards, through the hills, towards the castle of Cacabo.

CHAPTER V.

"Musa, degli anni e dell' oblio nemica,
Delle cose custode e dispensiera,
Vagliami tua ragion sì ch' io redica
Di quel Campo ogni Duce ed ogni schiera:
Suoni e risplenda la lor fama antica
Fatta dalli anni omai tacita e nera:
Tolto da tuoi tesori orni mia lingua
Ciò ch' ascolti ogni età, nulla l' estingua."

Gerusalemme Liberata.

The wild and irregular alley in the forest of Monreale, in which Sir Richard Mac Mardagh—to give him his new title—at length slacked rein after his escape from King William the Bad, gave little evidence of being the principal approach to the strong fortress of Cacabo,—the residence of Matthew Bonel, one of the greatest Norman barons in Sicily. Hither and thither it wound through the rank and

beautiful vegetation,—now turning to the right to avoid a clump of glorious chesnut trees or Italian pines, and now to the left at a respectful distance from a few prickly aloes, the stems of which, twenty feet high, often served as beams and timbers in the rude buildings of the country. Myrtles and other evergreen shrubs clothed the broken soil, that was already almost enameled with summer flowers, and cheated the eye and the heart into a forgetfulness of such winter as is ever known in that favoured climate. The bright sun shone overhead through the leafless boughs of the forest: and the bosom of the young man proudly swelled within him, as he thought of the honour he had received and of the noble manner in which he had asserted his own independence and his detestation of a tyrant.

He leaned forwards and patted the neck

of his gallant charger that panted beneath him. Well it was for the young adventurer that the Bishop of Syracuse had secured for him one of no ordinary stamp: for none but the best blood and bone could have so distanced its pursuers, weighted, as was its rider, with every piece of armour, offensive and defensive, with which the ingenuity of the times and the bounty of his royal patron had loaded him. He leaned forwards and patted the neck of his charger: then, with boyish defiance, rose in his stirrups and waved the heavy lance and its fluttering little pennoncelle around his head. Proudly he gazed down upon the gilt spurs he had so lately won; then proudly pressed them to his charger's side, and again moved onwards through the leafless glades of the forest. Higher and higher still wound the well-beaten track: till, after a couple of hours, it began to

circle up the base of a steeper ascent,—indicating the even turf that covered its northern side, while fissures and caverns and irregularly-jutting rocks, clothed in underwood and creeping plants, broke up the other three sides of the sugarloaf mountain, and seemed to defy even a hunter or a goat to approach, by any than the one road, the castle that crowned its summit.

Already the sentinel at the top of the lofty keep had descried the single horseman labouring up the ascent, and had wound his horn to give notice to the watchers in the wide courts below: and already the Baron of Taverna and his friends had rushed from the great hall which occupied the lower story of the tower,—a Norman erection in the centre of an ancient Saracenic fortress,—and had sped to the outer bars to welcome him

whom they believed to be Count Sanseverino returning from his perilous visit to the king. Their impatience was sorely taken aback when, in place of the well-known figure of their friend, surrounded, as he had gone forth, by a glittering retinue of followers, they descried only a single horseman, whose bearing, armour, and charger were alike unknown to them all.

"Another wanderer from cold Normandy to seek his fortune in the sunny land our fathers won!" muttered the savage Lord of Lesina.

"Nay," replied Roger dell' Aquila, as the new comer approached nearer to them all: "if such be his errand, he has sided with the wrong party. See; he has dubbed himself a champion of the king: 'Salve le roy' he proclaims on his shield: no such cognisance existed in Normandy."

"Nor can it exist here, my noble pa-

tron," exclaimed MacMardagh leaping from his horse beside the Baron of Taverna. "Let it be changed, I pray you, into 'Salve la foi'. Little I knew when I saved his life, that I was but preserving a butcher for the noble Sanseverino!"

"A butcher to Sanseverino! . . ."

"Is he dealt foully by? . . ."

"Has William dared? . . ." exclaimed, at the same moment, Lesina, Taverna, and Prince Tancred.

"You cannot fancy worse than has chanced, my lords," sadly responded the young man. "As the herald may have told you yesterday, the king detained me for special favour because I had saved his life in the tumult. He would restore me to the place to which I had been born in my own country: he knighted me, and led me forth and put under me a plump of spears—my vassals, he said, taken from

some fief which he had granted me: they opened their ranks and showed the body of the noble Sanseverino hanging by the neck on the Cassaro. I had heard an onslaught in the court of the palace while I watched in the chapel: he must have been foully murdered there. I dared the tyrant to his face: he told me that I should march beside him this day against yourselves: I scorned him to his face: and, thanks to the armour and the good steed that he had given me, I escaped from the midst of his avengers."

The hurried recital of the young man had been broken by the imprecations and the questions of the noblemen around. Enough, however, was said to make them understand their position.

"Let us retire within the walls, my lords," said Taverna with dignity. "Close the bars! Down with the portcullis! Up

with the drawbridge! Place sentinels at every angle, and let the men turn out and man the walls!" he exclaimed to some inferior officers of his castle. "Let us to council, messires, and decide upon what is next to be done."

He led the way into the great stone hall on the lowest story of the lofty keep, and his brother barons gathered around him. Short consultation was needed: the king, MacMardagh told them, was about to march against the castle. They resolved to attack rather than to await him. Surely the citzens of Palermo, so lately clamorous in admiration of Taverna, the slayer of Majone, would rise and take part with him rather than with the king, whom they had so lately dethroned for his tyranny! Nor could the king, as yet, have assembled any army; and although they themselves were scarcely prepared for war, the barons

deemed it most prudent to rush boldly down and encamp beneath the walls of the capital and there assemble their vassals, while they should, at the same time, cut off the approach of those who might have hastened to the standard of their sovereign.

The sun was still far from its setting, even on that eventful winter's day, when, in long and pompous array, the Baron of Taverna led forth the large garrison of his castle, and marshalled it with the vassals of the estate, who had gathered, at his hasty command, in the forest at the bottom of the hill. Simon of Policastro, Prince Tancred, the Baron of Lesina, and the Count of Aquila, all headed the large escorts of armed followers who had accompanied them to the castle of Cacabo; while messengers were riding off in every direction to the vassals on their different domains, and to summon friends and retainers to

join them under the walls of Palermo. The troopers, whom the murdered Count Sanseverino had led to the castle, rushed madly down the hill, and, placing themselves in the van of the little army, besought Taverna to permit them to strike the first blow to avenge their lord.

King William's troops had already left the city, and had begun their march towards the castle of Cacabo, when they caught sight of the advancing host of the barons. Terrified by the banners denoting the presence of such powerful leaders, and ignorant of the numbers around them, the royal forces fell back within the gates, and Taverna encamped beneath the walls. Marvellous was the change that seemed to have come over the character of our hero when, now for the first time since his slaughter of Majone, he had to play his part in the public drama of life. The he-

sitation which was, perhaps, natural to his character, but which had been so aggravated by the wiles which the late minister had employed, to keep before him the pretensions of Abderachman, and to make him believe that his only safety, for property and life, lay in an union with Corazza,—the hesitation which had been, more than all, confirmed by the strange warning of the hermit princess, Rosalia, to whom all the country now attributed the gift of prophecy and other supernatural powers, and whose augury few, indeed, would have then ventured to defy,—all this had now disappeared: he had renounced Corazza at whatever risk: he had defied her father, and, more than all, the fate foretold him by the prophetess: he had wooed, had won, and had wed his early love; and, against a king in arms, he was prepared to assert his right to choose according to the dictates of

his own heart, and to protect the noble countess who, for him, had dared so much. Gallant, frank, open, and decided was his bearing as he rode amongst his brother barons, while they took up their respective positions outside the different gates of the capital.

"Ride beside me, Mardano," he called to his late esquire: "these noble lords," he added, turning to Tancred and the others around him, "these noble lords will welcome, with me, a gallant stranger, who, whatever his former state in his own country, had refused at my hands the knighthood he had well deserved, and has received it from William of Hauteville, than whom, we all know, there is no truer soldier on the field of battle."

"Welcome, Sir Riccardo, amongst us!" replied Prince Tancred, leaping from his horse, and grasping the mailed hand of the

young Irishman. "By St. Martin of Tours! but my uncle has mounted and equipped thee gallantly!" he exclaimed, as his eye run over the different points of the armour and of the horse of the new knight.

"I know the young man well!" growled the Baron of Lesina; "but for his iron staff, we should have rendered good account of King William the other day, and should not now be here to war against him. However, it was a deed that deserved recompense from the king; and so that he now strive to make amends for it, I acknowledge him as a comrade."

"The very firebrand that my unlucky stars made me shut out from the castle of Mistretto!" cried Roger dell' Aquila. "However, he would but have disturbed our dalliance, and might have missed this fortune to himself: I give him joy!" added the young Count, with kindly frankness.

Night set upon the little besieging army as they settled themselves in their new quarters around the beleaguered city. Night set upon the peaceful summit of Mount Pellegrino, upon the sea glistening in the moonlight, and upon the thronged streets of Palermo. Again the partisans of the king,—the clergy and the Saracens,—who had excited the people to rise and rescue him during the former tumult, again, but more openly, circled from street to street and from house to house, and terrified the citizens by describing what they would have to undergo during the impending siege and the probable sacking of their town. The quarter of the Saracens was all astir. There Abderachman, dressed out in the semblance of the warlike native Amir he claimed to be, boldly collected such of his robber followers as were within the walls, and won fresh recruits from amongst

his countrymen and co-religionists, by reminding them of the insults and pillage they had endured during the recent captivity of King William, and that their only chance of protection lay in the maintenance of his authority. No officer of justice had leisure or inclination to note the reappearance of the outlaw, or to check his insolent bearing. All these were engaged in the service of the sovereign, whose newly-found energy still animated him to avenge himself on the slayer of his burly minion, the contemner of his feudal authority, and who, with the veteran skill he had ever displayed in war, was despatching emissaries in every direction, to encourage and summon those nobles on whom he could depend. Little sleep was there within the walls of Palermo; and the night wore quickly away.

Again the sun rose upon that beautiful landscape, and again the little farmers and

peasants, whom we have before described, hastened, with their loaded mules and donkeys, to supply the early market of the crowded city. Again the old man and his sprightly son, who had first discovered the dead body of Majone, preceded all their fellows, pressing forward beside those well-filled paniers.

"Madonna santissima!" they both exclaimed at once, as they caught sight of the encampment without, "what means yon tented field?" and they stood, uncertain whether to advance or to fly, while other countrymen came up behind them in equal terror and doubt. Not long were they left to hesitate. The purveyors of the troops were also astir, and quickly cut off, for the use of the little army, all that had been intended for the supply of the citizens. The prophet monk, Giovacchino, beheld the transaction from where he stood on the

summit of the tower of the cathedral. He caused the great bell to be rung, and hastened down to the vacant market-place,—vacant as to the stalls and booths, but thronged with anxious purchasers of the usual provisions for the day.

"Away! away! why stand ye idly here?" he loudly cried. "The rebels outside the gates have forestalled ye. Neither food nor wine can enter Palermo. Back, back to your homes; and tell your wives and children to prepare to keep a blacker Lent than was ever ordained by the church."

"Out, rather, and gather with me!" cried Abderachman, on his Arab steed. "Let us to the king, and pray him to lead us forth against those who would starve the people!"

The royal trumpets loudly sounded in the great square of the Alcazar. King William, armed from head to foot, bestrode

his heavy Norman charger, and marshalled his troops. The monk and the Saracen headed the tumultuous band that rushed towards him.

"Tempt me no further, good father," said the king, softly but sternly, to the monk. "I have had more than enough of your prophecies: tempt not my wrath. Who art thou, fellow?" he added, as he turned to the Saracen, and so cut short the reply which the monk was prepared to make: "Who art thou? We gladly see our Saracen subjects around us."

"I am one, monsignore, who have been hardly dealt with by your laws, and who have sternly avenged myself upon them. I am Abderachman, the outlaw—the husband of Corazza, the only child of the Lord Admiral, whom Matteo Bonel murdered. I am the rightful inheritor of the castle of Cacabo, and pledged to the death of Taverna, who usurps it."

"If thou accomplish that, thou mayest, indeed, succeed!" exclaimed the king. "The husband of Corazza!" he murmured. "A noble Christian damsel wed to an infidel! But I have not time to read riddles," he added, aloud. "Show what service thou canst do, sir outlaw, and it may be well with thee."

A private glance of exultation, unseen by all but themselves, was exchanged between Abderachman and the Saracen eunuch, Gaieto Pietro, the great chamberlain, who was beside the king, and who, a Christian only in name, could not refrain from showing that all his sympathies were with his countryman.

The gallant bearing of the handsome sovereign gave heart and courage to all. Hour after hour he sat his charger in the Cassaro, and marshalled those whom remembrance of his unvarying success, and

the inconvenience already felt by the deprivation of the daily supplies to the market, urged to his standard. His emissary, meanwhile, one of the canons of the cathedral, went from leader to leader, amongst the besieging army, pledging the king's pardon and favour to Taverna himself and to whomsoever would withdraw from the contest, and repeating the assurances which he had so lately made to the people, that, in future, he would govern with justice. Such offers and protestations, together with the high character of the envoy, were not without their effect. At one and the same instant, word was brought to the sovereign from the look-outs, placed on the different church towers of the city, that the broad banner of Count Simon of Policastro was seen winding away from the walls and the insurgents towards the forest of Monreale; and that the well-known cognizance of his

own friend, the powerful Count of Calvi, surrounded by a large band of retainers, was advancing from the opposite hills of Begaria. The king waited no longer. He brandished his lance aloft in his gigantic arm, and ordered the gates of the city to be thrown open. "Death to the rebels!" he cried, as he marshalled and dashed amongst the warlike citizens. "Now, Sir Outlaw, let us see whether the great deeds, which thy gentle Saracenic blood will prompt, be equal to thy lofty pretensions."

Abderachman asked no higher sanction. His own robber-band was around him, and those of the Saracen citizens, who had taken arms, naturally gathered near a leader of their own faith and nation, when they saw that he was countenanced by the sovereign. On they clattered pell-mell, over the drawbridges of St. Agatha and of the

other gates. The rebel leaders were taken by surprise; for the king's messenger was, even then, in their camp, and they did not believe that any attack would be made while he was proposing to them conditions of peace. Hastily they drew up their men; and Taverna galloped forwards at the head of his own followers. Abderachman, elated by the king's favour, spurred rashly against him. The well-aimed arrow that he shot from his bow as he rode, glanced from the iron plastron concealed beneath the hauberk of the knight. The baron rode onwards unharmed, and, disdainfully striking down the guard of the Saracen, overturned him and his slight steed with the mere weight of his own ponderous charger; then, scornfully passing on as the two rolled in the dust, pressed forwards to meet the advancing banner and the well-known knightly skill of his sovereign. The

two leaders, however,—for in those days one might almost so consider William of Hauteville and Matthew Bonel,—were unable to encounter each other personally. The gallant bands of the Count of Calvi rushed down unexpectedly upon the combatants, and our hero had to turn to meet this new danger.

Prowess, however, availed not against the usual good fortune of William. Attacked unexpectedly on all sides, the insurgent leaders drew off their forces from the unequal contest. Slowly and in good order, they rode back towards the sheltering forest of Monreale.

"The war is begun, my friends," exclaimed Taverna as they all rode together. "Each one must to his own territory to raise his followers and bring all he can to our common army. I, myself, at Cacabo, will prepare to withstand the first assault

of the treacherous tyrant: and, as it is nearest to Palermo, there, also, my lords, had you all better rally and reunite your vassals."

"We have but to follow up the plans we all together formed before our last rising," said Roger dell' Aquila. "I, for my part, will soon have a goodly body of men at arms around my castle of Aquila. Farewell, friends: time presses. You had better all disperse and arm like me." Then, riding up to Taverna, he whispered, "My little bride is all alone at Mistretto. I shall call for her as I pass. Shall I take thy Countess with me to Aquila?"

"No. more mad pranks, an thou lovest me," replied our hero. "Hadst thou not driven all messengers from Mistretto, this war had never been needed."

"Never been needed? Thou dreamest! Can Norman barons exist without war?

As well fight for one object as for another. Better far: for we have now to fight for our wives. Thou and I have the best of it thus far, for we have wed to our hearts' content. I only pray that the others, who have no wives to fight for, will remain staunch to the cause!"

The two young men embraced affectionately: and as Roger dell' Aquila set spurs to his horse, the other nobles, also, took leave of our hero, and departed on their several ways to collect and arm their followers in defence of the common cause.

Abderachman, meanwhile, had bounded from the earth where the heavy charger of Taverna had rolled him. Vaulting again into his saddle, he had turned sharply round as his ear caught the sound of a loud derisive laugh, which consciousness told him was at his own expense. He turned sharply round and saw King Wil-

liam's features distorted with mirth. This was not a time to improve the acquaintance he had so boastfully begun with his sovereign before the skirmish. He remembered that he was an outlaw: and slunk away from the confusion of the battle-field into the glades of the neighbouring forest.

"Another debt scored up against thee, Matteo Bonello!" he hissed, rather than muttered, as he angrily ground his teeth. "Oh, by Allah, we will have a pretty reckoning: and I will repay thee for the insult of not slaying me when I was in thy power."

Gradually, his robber-band collected around him; and they all retired to their usual places of concealment in the caverns of Monte Pellegrino and Monreale.

CHAPTER VI.

"Be it ever so humble, there 's no place like home.
A charm from the sky seems to hallow us there,
Which, seek through the world, is not met with elsewhere.
Home, sweet home! There is no place like home!"

Old Song.

Count Roger dell' Aquila had not proceeded far on his homeward journey, when he was overtaken by MacMardagh and a goodly escort of the troopers who had been around the Baron of Taverna.

"Bravo! bravo!" cried the young man as the Irishman joined him; "I warrant me that Matthew Bonel has remembered that he, too, has a bride. I thought he could not long hug the sulky fit in which he parted from me."

"I am, in truth, sent to escort the noble

Lady of Taverna to Cacabo, which my lord could not leave at this juncture. He knew that your Signoria was bent to Mistretto, and urged me to join you," replied the new comer; and the two young men rode on their way together.

Short time was needed, when the banner of Dell' Aquila was seen, to open those gates that had been kept so fatally closed, but one short week before, by the order of the thoughtless youth. He leapt from his charger in the court, and hastened to the well-loved room where he expected to find his bride. She was there beside the Lady of Taverna, whose arm was wound round her slender waist as they stood anxiously together in the centre of the room. The little bride flew, at once, to her husband, and hid her pretty face and her auburn tresses in his open arms. Clemence remained alone in the middle of the room:

for a few instants, she looked, all beaming, towards the door, as expecting Taverna to enter: for a few instants, she looked radiant and blissful: then quickly the look of joy faded from those speaking features, as doubts of his safety crossed her mind; and she was staggering to support herself against a marble consol in the centre of the apartment, when her fears were almost confirmed by the entrance of a strange knight. She recovered herself by a noble effort, while she brushed her flaxen hair from her forehead: then, with lips parted and almost as white as her beautiful complexion had suddenly become, with eyes beaming with unnatural brightness beneath those dark eyebrows and long-shading lashes, she stood the very image of love, enquiry, and doubt, that may not, will not, despair.

"He is well, dear lady, he is well!"

exclaimed MacMardagh, for it was he who entered, advancing towards her and dropping on one knee as he respectfully raised her drooping hand to his lips. "He is well, and has sent me to escort you to him at Cacabo."

"Thank heaven!" she sighed, as she momentarily cast those full blue eyes on high. They were instantly suffused with tears, but she allowed not a single drop to overflow the quivering lids; for resuming, at once, her natural sprightly manner, she exclaimed, "Mardano! my squire, who would not take knighthood from thy lord for only rescuing me from the Favara, and who is now armed and decked out like a very Norman count! Tell me, what more worthy hand than mine and that of thy patron have donned that glittering baldric and those saucy spurs?"

"No hands could be more worthy, noble

lady: but these were given me by Queen Margaret and the tyrant William of Hauteville," replied the blushing but delighted youth.

"Oh, I crave pardon of your knighthood, Sir Riccardo Mardano," replied the lady, as she bent with mock but lowly reverence. "We have not time, however, at present," she added, "to hear the story of thy prowess, nor the justification of thine ingratitude which can so speak of those who have lately conferred such honour. Thou didst say that my lord had sent thee to escort me to Cacabo. In one hour, I will be ready to take horse."

She tripped lightly from the room, and again casting her arm round the waist of Agatha, as she, also, was leaving it to prepare for her journey, the two lovely young women went forth together.

"Now that thou art knighted thou must

get thee a wife, Sieur Riccardo," exclaimed Dell' Aquila, slapping him boisterously on the shoulder, when the two young men were thus left alone. "By heavens! for such a bride as that, it were worth braving the anger of a score of kings!"

"No king will heed whom I may woo or wed," replied MacMardagh quietly.

"I should think not!" exclaimed the count, with the inconsiderate haughtiness of a great Norman lord of those days. "And yet, I doubt not, that happiness and love may be found, to a certain extent, in all classes," he added, in a tone that was meant to be conciliatory, condescending, and philosophical.

The younger adventurer answered not; and soon left the apartment, as he said, to look after his men. Perhaps, in his own mind, he was drawing what the count would have deemed impertinent compari-

sons between the attractions and capabilities of happiness of the more humble Theresa and of the most noble lady Agatha.

At the appointed time, the ladies and their escorts were mounted in the court, and hastened from the castle of Mistretto. They had heard of the defeat of the barons, and were well aware how needful it was to place themselves within the circuit of impregnable fortifications before the royal troops should occupy all the roads. At a short distance from the castle, they parted with many tender adieus and expressions of heartfelt love. The Count of Aquila led his bride towards his own more distant territory, while Clemence, accompanied by her companion Theresa, urged the Irishman to speed forwards on their way to Cacabo.

Is it needful to describe how gallantly

MacMardagh endeavoured to bestride his war horse and to show off his newly-won panoply in the eyes of Theresa, while he rode beside the Lady of Taverna, and seemed to be giving his whole attention to the latter? Is it needful to say that, amid all his courtly devotion to the beautiful Clemence, he found means to put in many a little attention and to whisper many a gallant word to the gently-smiling girl, whenever the inequalities of the road, or the pretence of giving fresh orders to his men, caused them to break the regular order of their march? Nor will we assert that Theresa was all-unobservant of these little attentions, or insensible to the more gallant bearing of him who had, half seriously, half in joke, proclaimed himself her admirer, while he had nothing but his black serge dress, his iron machue, his own warm heart, and the confidence of his lord

to recommend him. The young girl had indeed ever made light of his devotion, and had proclaimed her own half-formed inclinations to the cloister as a bar to his fervid pretensions: she had endeavoured to consider herself, and to make him think of her, as of one who must ever remain uninfluenced by such feelings as might actuate others of her age. But her age, in truth, what was it? The orphan daughter of a small Norman feudatory of the king, devoted, from her infancy, to be the playmate and the companion of the children of the sovereign, her mind—forming itself apart from, and yet in conjunction with, the more volatile or less earnest natures around her—had assumed a character beyond her years. The solitary position of an orphan had worked upon her from her earliest childhood, and had given her a great degree of self-dependance. Recollected,

steady, and pious in the midst even of their childish plays and childish dissensions, she had gradually come to be looked up to by the other children, and had gradually assumed to herself the responsibilities of a tender monitor and most trustworthy guide, —of a mother even, rather than of an elder sister. When, at the request of the queen, she had gone to live, for a while, as the companion of the High Admiral's daughter, Corazza, the same steady adherence to principle, the same pious recollectedness had accompanied her, although Corazza herself was less passive to its influence. Amid the royal children, a word or a look from Theresa, a suggestion that they should play some less boisterous game, or should sing together some touching hymn, had always swayed the little tenants of the nursery in their most unamiable mood. Corazza felt the influence of the more generous cha-

racter, but rebelled against it: and when the little vixen definitively cast her lot with Abderachman, it was with sad forebodings of what that lot would be that her gentle companion had left her. Gladly and joyfully, however, as far as she herself was affected, had Theresa hastened back to the Lady Clemence,—once the inmate, with her, of the royal nurseries,—and, beneath the shadow of her strong protecting mind, had already begun to throw off her premature seriousness, and to remember that, in years, she herself was yet scarcely a woman.

"The signorina Theresa seems all joyous at the prospect of civil war!" exclaimed MacMardagh, addressing her and the lady of Taverna. "From her anxiety to thwart our plot and prevent the rising of the barons, I had little thought she carried so brave a spirit."

The young girl smiled, well-pleased, but spoke not; while her friend exclaimed, "My Theresa is always joyous when she is not overwhelmed by great responsibilities; and all these she has now cast upon me. But hold, Sir Riccardo, what mean those troopers who block our way?"

The young knight's attention had been already riveted upon a small body of horsemen who were coming up in front of them. He hastily ordered his own escort to close their ranks around the two ladies, and was about to ride forward to interrogate the new-comers, when one, who was evidently a superior officer amongst them, galloped up and saluted the little party.

"Signor Cavaliere," he said, addressing MacMardagh, "we know not by what title to greet you; but we are vassals of the lands which the king assigned to you, and are some of those whom he himself placed

under you, yesterday morning, in the square of the Alcazar."

"I thank you for your duty and your goodwill," replied MacMardagh, greatly relieved from the fears which had made them all expect a hostile encounter where they had, instead, found armed security.

"We," continued the man-at-arms, while the others, to the number of about a score, gathered around him, "We, who are natives of part of the patrimony of the murdered lord of Squillace, joyfully transfer our allegiance to him who avenged our lord upon the felon, Majone."

"What!" exclaimed the Lady of Taverna, "were you vassals of the poor Count of Squillace, whom Majone treacherously inveigled into his power, and then, innocent of any crime, and without a trial, deprived of his eyes and of his tongue?"

"Even so, noble lady!" replied the of-

ficer; "and we joyfully recognize our avenger in the Baron of Taverna, and in our new lord, this gallant young knight."

"Form your ranks then, my friends!" exclaimed the delighted adventurer, "and follow me and this noble lady to the castle of Cacabo, where, I promise you, opportunities of continued revenge shall not be wanting to those who have hearts and arms, and who know, like you, how to use them."

Gallantly, and in high spirits, they all hastened forwards, winding amid those wooded hills which rose higher and higher on the left hand; while, through frequent openings on the right, they caught glimpses of the sunny sea between the tufted knolls, the orange groves, and the white villages and churches of Begaria. Their road led them further from these, and higher amid the hills beyond the forest of Monreale. It

was broken and uneven, and often overhung by steep banks, like the smugglers' tracks that remain to us in many parts of England. Sometimes it led them down a steep descent, and across the stony bed of a little torrent, and then abruptly clomb amid the Spanish chestnut groves on the opposite side. At length they skirted the brink of one of these less precipitous streams in which a considerable flow of water rushed, with smaller leaps and more meandering leisure, towards the sea. They skirted it for a while, not in search of a fording place, for its depth was nowhere sufficient to occasion any difficulty; but because the mountain on the opposite side was so precipitous and wooded that no path could wind amid its broken terraces and tangled slopes. MacMardagh pointed to the old Saracenic walls, and to the lofty Norman keep that towered amongst them

on the summit of the wooded mount, and informed the two ladies, whom he escorted, that they beheld the castle of Cacabo. Well pleased were they to note the impregnable nature of its position; while their advance was rendered more slow by the little droves of cattle and sheep that, winding down from different paths on the other hand, poured into the main road beside the stream. Many an anxious peasant accompanied them; and, here and there, our travellers passed a cottage, which had hitherto remained secure in the shelter of the lordly castle, but the inmates of which, now gathered around the door, were preparing, on foot, on horseback, or in the wicker trucks of the country, to betake themselves to its safer enclosure, and beyond the power of the royal army, which was evidently expected. Old men and women, and merry and fretful children,

gathered round the more robust and middle-aged of every little household, and joyed in the prospect of change, or querulously complained that their age and infirmities were no protection against a foe who would avenge upon them the crime of being born vassals of the lords of Taverna.

The lowing of the cattle, the bleating of the sheep, the cries of the children, the oaths of the men, and the clamours of the women, the dust and the confusion, were increased fiftyfold, when now the little party of our heroine had circled the base of the mountain on that side, and, crossing the stream on a pointed stone bridge of one arch, emerged on the open space in front of its northern declivity. Here, as we have said, the ascent was less broken; and as the road-track wound, backwards and forwards, across the turf-clad face of the cone, it was dotted here and there by similar

groups of cattle, of flocks and of peasant-families, all collected together, and forming a broken procession upwards towards the lofty keep.

"This, my Theresa, looks indeed like preparation for serious warfare!" exclaimed the Lady Clemence to her friend: "I hope the walls are as strong as they are imposing."

"If they are not subdued until we have eaten all these poor sheep and cows, we shall be safe, dear lady, for this many a month," answered the young girl, smiling.

They began winding up the steep ascent; but had not risen halfway to the bars when a gallant troop of cavaliers was seen hurrying from the portal and rapidly descending towards them. Taverna himself was there, his broad banner borne before him, while friends and retainers formed a rich retinue behind. The young man hurried down to

meet his bride; and rich, bright, and happy was the glow upon that noble countenance as he leapt from his charger, and cheerily grasping her hand, while he whispered some words of love into her ear, strode again up the hill beside her panting horse. Glittering and triumphant was the swollen escort of the nobles; and proudly swung the great banner from the flagstaff at the top of the keep; and defiant broke forth the clang of martial music as the drawbridge fell, and, through trebled and quintupled ranks of armed followers, the great baron led his noble bride under the portals and into the wide courtyard of his castle. A cheer of welcome uprose from all the throng; to which Clemence replied with stately and becoming condescension. Then, nerved to enthusiasm by the scene around, she caught the sword from the scabbard, where it hung at the side of her

husband, and "I too, messires," she exclaimed, "I too claim to take my share in the defence of our home. Remember how our Norman mothers fought and conquered at the side of their lords. Let me endeavour to prove to you that their spirit still lives in Clemence of Taverna."

She sprang from her saddle into the arms of her husband; and while redoubled cheers arose on high, she hid her beaming face and her happy blushes for a moment on his swelling chest. Then looking around with a smile, she dashed the rising tear from her eye, and laid her hand in that of Taverna, who led her, with proud courtesy, past the keep, and across the ample courts, to a broad, low turret at the further angle of the yard.

"Long may it be, my Clemence," he said, "before we are obliged to take refuge in the keep for greater safety. Until then,

thou wilt find the rooms in this old Saracenic tower more retired and quiet and homely; for at last I have thee at home,—my home and thine!" he added, as he tenderly kissed her, and folded her in his arms: for only Theresa and MacMardagh had followed them, and they were now in the seclusion of the turret he had selected for her.

The room in which they stood was of fair dimensions and beautiful proportions, and was fitted up with all that elegance which Greek and Saracenic artists then expended for the admiration and enjoyment of their less refined Norman conquerors. Hangings of blue satin were richly gathered in fluted folds, from the top to the bottom of the walls, and divided into compartments by massive cords of yellow silk, and pendent tassels of glittering bullion. The furniture of marble and richly-carved ori-

ental woods was divided by sofas and couches and cushions of blue satin and velvet, embroidered with flowers and arabesques, worked in unspun silk of the richest maize colour. The room formed the angle of the pile of buildings, and one small window, in each of its two outer walls, overlooked the wild country and the precipitous rocks that shelved down immediately underneath. Amid the stray trees and underwood, the hurrying stream was seen glowing, now and then, in the light of the setting sun, as it came down a little wooded valley in the opposite hills, and, mingling its waters with those of a smaller brawling torrent that rushed down a more precipitous glen on the left, appeared almost to circle the base of the mountain on which the castle stood, until the broken wavelets, the streaks of light, and the hurrying foam, alike disappeared

beneath the high-pointed arch over which our heroine had just approached the fortress. The sides of the valleys and glens, thus divided by the waters, were all more or less precipitous and wooded: and ever and anon, in the distance, they upbore a cottage, a church, a monastery, or a feudal castle, whose lofty turret or whitewashed walls gleamed cheerfully from amid the embowering trees. The Lady Clemence gazed delighted at the tranquil prospect; then followed her husband into two or three other adjoining rooms, which were fitted up with the same taste for her occupation, and overlooked scenes of a similar character.

All those buildings which surrounded the great courts through which they passed, were evidently of Saracenic origin, repaired and strengthened by their Northern conquerors. The great keep alone, in the

lower story of which Taverna and his brother barons had met and conspired, was entirely added, according to the principles of Norman defensive warfare. Around it, and in the many courts,—in the stables, the sheds, and the varied buildings, some of which, intended for the greater vassals and retainers and guests of the lord, were decorated with arched cloisters below and open galleries above,—the herds, the flocks, the terrified peasants, and the men-at-arms, whom we have seen hurrying to the castle, gradually found their quarters and settled themselves as the short twilight died away. The noise and the confusion were gradually controled beneath the regulated sway of the chastelain and his subordinates. The lowing of the herds and the bleating of the flocks, the cries of the lambs and of the children,—so alike that it was difficult to distinguish one from the other,—were gra-

dually hushed in repose. The carousing of the soldiers, and the boisterous welcoming of new bodies of retainers, continued for some hours longer. Gradually these, also, died away. And calm and beautiful was the starry sky and silent were the woods, that gave forth no sound but the occasional song of the nightingale and the ceaseless murmur and splash of the little streamlet, as Taverna and Clemence sat, side by side and hand in hand, at the open window, and overlooked and drank in the charm of the peaceful scene, that was to be so soon disturbed by the clash of war and disfigured by sights of vengeance.

CHAPTER VII.

"Good heaven! the souls of all my tribe defend
From jealousy!" *Othello.*

The night, that had so calmly settled down upon the castle and its surrounding woods, had cleared away: and the late sunrise had shown a far less peaceful scene. When once aroused from his sloth, no one was more active in war than King William: and while all slept at the castle of Cacabo, his troops and the citizens who supported him had passed out of Palermo, on horse and on foot, and had densely circled the house of the rebel baron of Taverna. Thus was he cut off from the assistance of other nobles who might have gathered around him: and while the besieging army had

been supplied with all that was needed from the city, thus had those within the castle been already driven to support themselves upon the herds and flocks that had been so opportunely collected within the walls. Fodder, however, had not been brought in with equal foresight: and the impossibility of long feeding the living animals, had caused them to be despatched with a provident wastefulness, the consequences of which already began to be felt.

But still the besiegers gained not a foot of land upon the sides of the mountain, which Taverna and his garrison gallantly defended from almost hourly attacks. Still less had they been able to establish a footing upon the level tableland in front, on which alone they might have erected such rude implements of timber as were used in those days with which to batter beleaguered walls. The siege had been drawn on week

after week, marked only by acts of individual gallantry; while the king seemed inclined to trust to the sure aid of famine to reduce the garrison, and while Taverna anxiously awaited the rising and gathering of his brother rebels that they might together fall upon the whole body of the royal army.

Amid the tangled copsewood and the overhanging trees that covered, as we have said, the face of the mountain that arose beyond the stream, and on the other side of the valley, opposite to the tower in which the Lady Clemence had taken up her abode, was a rude dwelling, partly excavated in the side of the rock and partly enclosed by rough unhewn stones, piled strongly in Saracenic times against it. Here Abderachman had fixed his quarters: sufficiently removed from the royal troops to be in little danger of attracting the notice of the sove-

reign on himself, and yet sufficiently near to be able to claim the merit of assisting the king, and to do good service should any opportunity offer. None such had yet presented themselves: and he lay indolently in the sunshine, amid the surrounding copsewood at the door of his rude dwelling. His bow was in his hand, and a quiver and a pile of arrows were on the turf beside him. From a sort of loophole cut in the masonry above him, Corazza, also, gazed forth over the valley and upon the castle on the opposite hill. Her dress was no longer splendid as we have first beheld it: but although still rich, little now remained of the Norman and Greek fashions which she had heretofore delighted to combine. It was now almost exclusively that of the Saracenic women of Sicily: and was of such material and make as was proper to the haram of the most wealthy burgher of Pa-

lermo. The old duenna, whom we have before seen in her company, was busied in an inner room of the hovel, and occasionally cast malicious glances on her young and capricious and beautiful charge.

Corazza heeded them not. Those eyes, which had glanced so quick and expressive in her early and ambitious childhood, had acquired an intensity of meaning which was almost painful to the beholder, as they shot, thoughtful and vengeful, from amid her jet black tresses and the gipsy complexion of her beautiful face. At times, the look softened; and a swelling tear rose within it and suffused the broad pupil; while the dark red lips quivered, obedient to a sentiment of passing anguish as she thought of her father and of the lost dreams of her childhood. But she pettishly brushed the token of weakness away; although the rosy lip curled with an expres-

sion of loathing as she glanced down upon the figure of Abderachman on the grass outside the wall.

" I have sold myself for revenge, and he alone can give it me," she murmured, as she placed her hand before her smarting eyes, and shut out the hated sight of her tyrant. After a few moments, she removed the nut-brown hand, and started as she once more raised her eyes to the walls of the opposite castle. The window of the sitting-room, occupied by Clemence in the turret, was opened wide ; and the honoured Norman wife leaned out from it to survey the landscape. Her great dog, Mustafa, laid his paws upon the stone sill of the window ; and showed his shaggy head and neck beside her. For a while, the lady gazed ; and looked up and down the valley ; and on the trees of the opposite hill : and although she was far too distant to

behold her features, Corazza fancied in them a look of quiet dignity and satisfaction as she saw her turn her head to the right and to the left, while she thoughtlessly patted the great head of the dog. Then, when that look seemed riveted on the trees amid which she herself lay hid, Corazza fancied that they must pierce the foliage and distinguish her as she crouched behind the loophole; and hard, vengeful and defiant was the savage stare with which the fallen one returned that imaginary look of recognition. Clemence, however, saw her not—saw not any one, save a passing horseman or two on the road below, and the glitter of weapons amid the more open glades of the forest. It was a beautiful scene; and she stood and enjoyed it; and endeavoured to draw good augury from the strong position of her husband's castle and the remembrance of his many friends.

That husband entered as she stood and thought: and little dreaming who watched his every movement from the opposite hill, he advanced towards the window, and, casting an arm round the shoulders of his wife, fondly drew her to his breast. She returned his caress; while the great dog stretched himself against his iron-clad thighs.

"Hell and fury!" muttered Corazza between her teeth, as she hastily left the loophole and rushed out in front of the cavern. "Of much use, Abderachman," she cried, "of much use are thy boasted bows and arrows, if they cannot hit thy great enemy when he shows himself before thee!"

"What meanest thou, my dove?" replied the Saracen, in a languid and yet somewhat sneering tone, as he stretched himself at length upon the grass. She caught up a bow and arrow from his side; and taking

aim at the window opposite, madly drew the string, with more than woman's force, to her ear. The arrow struck idly amid the foliage and boughs of an overhanging tree; while an exclamation of pain broke from the little vixen, as she let fall the bow and pressed her fingers, which had been nearly cut in two by the twang of the string.

"What is it, my dove?" exclaimed Abderachman, starting to his feet: "and has my little gazelle hurt her pretty fingers!" he added, as he noted her gestures of pain; and, taking her brown hand, pressed his lips upon the injured part. Corazza writhed disdainfully in his grasp: but he only smiled at her childish efforts, and continued to pet and mock her.

"Oh, if I were a man!" she exclaimed, "would I not invent bows or something of the sort that should carry a bolt as far as

the eye could see its foe! But you go on with your stupid bows and arrows that are fit to be playthings only for children."

"And, therefore, my Corazza would play with them and hurt her little hand!" answered the Saracen in a coaxing tone, and continuing to kiss and fondle it.

"How long are we to stop idly here, Abderachman?" she asked at length more gently, as she suppressed her feelings by a violent effort, and passively submitted to his dalliance. "Methinks that there is little chance that the king will ever bestow the Castle of Cacabo upon thee if thou leave to others the honour of taking it, and skulk here until the deed be done. This was not the promise held out to me when I left my own people and joined myself to thee. Thou didst tell me then that the castle was thine inheritance, and that thou couldst find an entrance into it by a thousand different ways."

"One way is as good as a thousand, my dove," replied Abderachman: "and the kindly feeling thou dost evidently nourish towards the usurper, Matteo Bonello,—for I marked," he added slyly, "at whom that foolish arrow was aimed,—proves to me that I may trust thee. I and my cousin Azab, and a few of my most trusted men, have not been quite so idle as thou dost deem. There are means of entering those walls which their stupid Norman usurpers wot not of. The memory of these exists in some of our own people; and I have only tarried until I could trace out and re-open the forgotten passages, and clear away such obstructions as their new masonry may have unwittingly placed across them. This very night the first attempt will be made, and my men are now resting in the cavern with the horses, that they may be ready for duty at sunset. Smile, then, upon me, my

gazelle," he somewhat imperiously added: "smile upon me and reward me for my care."

"My own husband!" sighed the little gipsy, as she looked up into his haughty and handsome face with glances of blended terror and fondness, amid which glowed the ill-concealed fire of deeper yet undefined passion. Abderachman was satisfied. He looked down upon her with condescending admiration of her pretty face: patted her flushed cheek: and unwound her little arms from his own lofty and sinewy frame. Then seating her upon a fragment of hewn stone beside their hut, strode up and down before it, with the look and the bearing of one of those Emirs who had conquered half the world.

However inspiriting and exciting the days of which we write may have been to knights and warriors, wearily they passed

to the noble dames secluded in those fortified castles, and without the possibility of taking exercise beyond the walls, or of solacing the weary hours within by the companionship of the fashionable newspaper, or of the contents of the circulating library. So felt Clemence of Taverna as now the evening closed in, and as, returning from her walk on the battlements, she felt that existence had capabilities of being made more agreeable, and that her mind had the capacity of taking in a larger store of more varied and interesting information than could be imparted while the art of printing was unknown. She returned to her own apartment, and seated herself again at that open window to mark the stars as they shone out, one by one, in that deep, azure sky. Listlessly she sat and marked them, while her mind, wandering back to past scenes, was drawn, by some strange

fascination, to dwell upon her husband's lengthened courtship of herself, and on the brief period of sorrow when the machinations of Majone would have compelled him to wed his own daughter, Corazza. The image of Corazza seemed to arise involuntarily before her; and when she would have dispelled it by rousing Mustafa, who slept stupidly at her side, the sight of the very dog did but remind her of the part she had played when once she repelled her lover's devotion on the plea that she had been busied in tending it. Still her thoughts involuntarily wandered to Corazza; and she marveled within herself what manner of person she could have been, and whether her husband would ever have found happiness with any other wife than herself. No shade of jealousy crossed her noble mind: she believed in his love, and was content and tranquil; but the thought of Corazza

floated before her as an unpleasant dream which she could not dispel.

Would any one, in those ages, have doubted the truth of the national superstition, have doubted the power of the Evil Eye, had they known that, at that very hour, Corazza herself was at her loophole in the rude wall, peering anxiously across the valley, and endeavouring to read the very features and expression of her whose form only she could dimly discover through the increasing darkness? Corazza was there, with wide open and distended black eyes, darting glances of jealous fury against her unconscious rival; while, with heaving breast, and ear turned ever and anon to the opening, she appeared to listen anxiously for some expected signal, and to await its fulfilment.

The Lady Clemence saw not her; knew not of her connexion with Abderachman,

nor that she was in the neighbourhood of the castle. She saw her not. But to divert her mind to better thoughts, she began gently to murmur to herself the sweet national hymn of Sicily. One verse led on to another, and one hymn and song to another,—such as she had been used to sing them with the Princess Rosalia and Theresa in the royal nursery of the Alcazar,—the hymns of Sicily and Greece, interspersed with the wild and rude romances which their Norman ancestors had brought with them to the conquest of this fair southern land. Unmoved, the great dog still lay at her feet, and seemed so soundly to sleep that he heeded not her varying tunes, nor the slight calls to himself with which she bespoke his companionship between the different songs. All at once, he uttered a low growl; but still crouched, unmoving, where he lay. Clemence heeded

it not, and continued her warbled hymns. Again the dog growled, more fiercely than before; and, starting upon its legs, looked fixedly in the eyes of its mistress.

"What is it, Mustafa? What is it, old fellow?" she said.

The dog moved not: but continued to growl savagely. Then, dashing furiously across the room, stood at the opposite side, with its nose down where the blue silk hangings of the wall swept the cushioned floor. The Lady Clemence also arose, and listened, breathless, where he stood. She, too, heard the sounds that had disturbed Mustafa: the noise of feet and then of a huge stone, that seemed to have been displaced and to be rolling downwards.

"Theresa," she spoke in a loud whisper to the inner room, "Theresa, go call my husband:—summon the officer with his guard to hasten quickly hither. Quick,

and question not," she added, as she waved away the young girl, who would have made inquiry and urged caution.

Theresa sped away through the one door that opened from the turret on the inner court.

"Good Mustafa! Brave dog!" whispered the Lady Clemence as she stood breathless beside him and listened to the increasing noise. It approached more rapidly than she had expected: and then, while it and every other sound was overpowered by the now fierce barking of the dog, as he scratched against the floor of the room, there was a sudden crash of falling mortar and loose stones behind the silken hangings; and Abderachman, armed to the teeth, forced his way from amid the folds.

Mustafa instantly flew at the throat of the intruder, while the lady rushed towards

the door; then paused, and turned to see if other enemies followed; she discovered two or three turbaned heads behind, whose further advance was prevented by the struggle of their leader with the dog.

"Mustafa! Let go, Mustafa, and follow!" she cried, anxious to save her favorite. But the dog was too stanch to loose his prey: and as the other Saracens forced their way in, she fled through the outer door and quickly bolted it behind her.

"There is no need for haste, Matteo dear," she said, as she met the Baron of Taverna outside, rushing forwards with his terrible battle-axe. "They cannot pass beyond the one turret. Wait for sufficient men to seize them all in the trap they have chosen."

The garrison on that side of the castle was now thoroughly astir: and MacMardagh, whom Theresa had sought, after

meeting and giving the alarm to the baron, was rushing forwards at the head of half-a-hundred armed men. The bolt was quickly drawn: and, with flashing swords and many a flaring torch, they pushed forwards to the rooms in the tower. The Saracens had heard them coming; and aware that their intended surprise had been frustrated, had betaken themselves again to the covered way by which they had approached. Abderachman alone lingered at the aperture; and, signing to the Baron of Taverna with his curved scimitar, "Matteo Bonello," he said, "the rightful owners of a house alone know all the ways into it. This is not the only one; au revoir, please Allah!"

He disappeared amid the darkness as he spoke; and it would have been too rash to follow unadvised while a besieging army lay, perhaps, in ambush, amid unknown

excavations. The baron was turning away, when his pointed boot struck against a soft substance. He called for a torch, and the shaggy body of poor Mustafa was discovered weltering in its blood. The poor brute opened its eyes and gazed fondly at its master, and even attempted to wag its tail in token of recognition. The thick-crowding anxieties that beset him could not make the young man disregard the pitiable state of his wife's favorite: and what Norman noble in those days would not have been interested in the fate of so noble a wolf hound! He bent kindly over it; and, having ascertained that it was only sorely wounded and might be cured, gave it in charge to his attendants, and hastened to seek out his bride.

Corazza had watched from the opposite side of the valley. Her gipsy face between her nut-brown hands, she had rested her

elbows upon the ledge of that narrow loop-hole, and peered through the darkness at the castle turret. Nothing had she been able to discover while the Lady Clemence sat in darkness at the window,—nothing while, disturbed by the noise, she had watched with the dog for the arrival of the foe, and had then fled to the courtyard of the castle. But still Corazza watched, and inwardly chafed at the prolonged delay. Suddenly there was a rush of armed men, with blazing torches, into the room. She saw it all through the open window; she saw Taverna himself, and she put up a prayer for his protection against the wiles of Abderachman. It was a thoughtless impulse at first, but she repeated the prayer: —"Oh, if *he* could but kill Clemence, and the other kill *him!*" she ejaculated, as she angrily clutched hold of her own wildly-waving hair. But the torches still gleamed

through the window, and gleamed from the armour of more and more armed men, who thronged around Taverna. No turban was amongst them,—not even that of a prisoner.

"The boasting fool has failed!" exclaimed Corazza, as she flung herself from the loophole, and rushed out to cool her fevered brow with the fresh night-air of the forest.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?" *Macbeth.*

Although the attempt of Abderachman had signally and entirely failed, it produced a deep effect upon the mind of the Lord of Taverna. That the traditionary knowledge of the Saracen should have been baffled only by the more recent furnishing of the room for the reception of Clemence, of which the other was necessarily ignorant, proved how dangerous such modes of access might be to the fortress. The attempt had been baffled, it is true, this time; but his audacious enemy boldly declared that other

means of entrance existed, of which the Norman conquerors knew nothing; and what had been so nearly achieved, led Taverna to believe in the correctness of the assertion.

"I cannot remain here, my love," he said that night to his wife; "I cannot remain with thee, cooped in these old walls, till either the king starve us out, or these pagan rascals open some unknown burrows under the walls, and break in upon us unawares. It were better far to rush down all together upon the besiegers, and, cutting our way through their ranks, rally our tardy friends in the open field. My spirit pines within these walls; and I shall dread to leave thee an instant alone, lest the Saracens break unaware into thy room, and carry thee beyond my reach."

The gallant spirit of the Lady Clemence approved the bold suggestion. It was only

Mustafa who had saved them a few hours before; and with the confidence becoming the wife of a baronial lord in those days, she assented to the dangerous sortie that her husband had planned. With the early morning, all in the castle were astir; the whole garrison was drawn out. Those who were to remain behind were told off to the different bastions, and were placed under the command of the Lady Clemence's brave uncle, the old knight Tommaso, who undertook to maintain the walls against the lessened forces that King William would be able to leave around them, when the baron should raise his standard in the open country. The rest, the more able-bodied, were collected in serried ranks within the great court. The portcullis was hoisted up; the drawbridge fell. To the bray of trumpets and to the clash of cymbals, intended to inspirit the men, the light archers

and crossbow-men hurried out first; the heavy-armed foot followed; and, after them, Taverna, MacMardagh, Clemence, and her friend Theresa, rode bravely forth at the head of the few horsemen who were of the garrison and of his own especial followers who had joined themselves to the standard of the new knight.

"Remain, and guard the lady, I command thee, Mardano!" exclaimed the baron, as he dashed his spurs against his horse and bounded to the head of the column. "Forwards, my friends, forwards!" he cried, as he waved them to rush down the even face of the mountain. "'God help us!' let us shout the old war-cry of the Normans; and let the others rally to the cry of 'William the Bad!' an they like it."

"God help us!"—uprose the same cry from the royal army, as they formed their ranks and gallantly rushed forwards to

meet the outpouring garrison—disregarding and trampling aside in the *melée* the professional minstrels, who would have adhered to ancient custom and begun the conflict with a war song. The king himself had rode out from Palermo the day before, and was quickly in his saddle. With all the barons around him, he rushed gladly to meet the rebel Taverna. They forded the little stream, and hemmed in the garrison on either side as it reached the level ground. The great Count of Calvi spurred forward to encounter our hero, but lost his stirrups and fell beneath the stroke of his unerring lance. William himself came on, and before those around could mark the importance of the single combat that impended, the two adversaries met in mid career, and the lances of either of them flew, in splinters, beneath the shock. Other combatants interposed between them

—eager to curry favour, under the very eye of the sovereign, by striking down the obnoxious baron. But it was known that few equalled Taverna in all knightly exercises: his lance was broken; but he hurled the haft of it at the head of an advancing Saracen emir and felled him from his horse. Then, unslinging his heavy battle-axe from his saddle-bow, he struck down in succession all who closed around him. The weapon broke in his hand; and he drew his great sword from its scabbard. Large and tall in stature, clothed in impenetrable armour, with skill unrivalled in the use of weapons, he laughed to scorn every proposal to surrender. But the enemy, reinforced by the king's unexpected return, pressed upon him from every side: the sword was shivered to pieces on the helmet of an advancing Norman.

"Yield thee! yield thee, Matteo!" ex-

claimed the well-known voice of his former friend, the Count of Calvi, who was again in his saddle.

"Never!" replied Taverna. "Better far to perish here than to submit to the justice of the murderer of Sanseverino!"

A trooper was striking at him where he sat unarmed on his war steed: the blow was turned aside, with an Irish imprecation, by MacMardagh.

"Back, Riccardo!" exclaimed Taverna. "Back: I charge thee with the Lady Clemence; defend her and my castle. I commit her safety to thee."

MacMardagh hesitated a moment, when a stone from a sling (a not unfrequently-used implement in those days) struck against the head of his lord and tumbled him, stunned, from his horse.

"Take him alive! Take him alive!" shouted the well-known brutal voice of the king.

"Harm him not! Harm him not!" cried Di Calvi, springing down and seizing him by the helmet.

Stunned and unable to defend himself, they all closed around him. MacMardagh galloped back to the Lady Clemence.

"Where is thy lord?" she exclaimed, as the Irishman rode up.

"He is unharmed, lady, and commands me to fly with you back to the castle."

"I stir not without him," she answered resolutely.

"He is a prisoner beyond rescue, lady," replied MacMardagh; "else, believe me, I would not have left him. Let us hasten back and defend the castle, until we can make terms for his ransom."

"Right—right, Mardano! Recall the men: get them in order, and withdraw all thou canst within the walls. But tell them not," continued the brave wife, "tell them

not that thy lord is a prisoner, else they might fear to return, and we should not be able to man the walls. Keep the banner of Taverna flying below as long as possible, to encourage the men and protect our retreat. Come, Theresa, come," she added; and they rode slowly and in good order back to the impregnable castle.

MacMardagh and the other officers gradually drew off the men, and formed their ranks as they more rapidly retreated. Although it had been impossible to cut through the dense masses which the king had brought to bear upon them, yet the vantage ground on which they now stood, as they retreated up the steep ascent, enabled them to repel every attack. Soon they were within the shelter of the towering walls; and the royal troops dared not venture within reach of the stones, missiles, and boiling water, that were ready to be

showered down upon them. The garrison recrossed the drawbridge: it rose, and again the portcullis fell.

The Lady of Taverna sat her horse in the courtyard, beside the gateway, as the garrison re-entered. Holding in one hand a lance, from the point of which fluttered a little pennoncelle marked with the cognizance of her husband, she frankly greeted each body of men, and thanked them for the prowess they had shown. She was prodigal in her promises of reward; and her uncle, the old Knight of Mistretto, who stood beside her, swore stoutly that Simon of Policastro and the Count of Aquila were hastening up with a large body of men to relieve them. A liberal allowance of wine was served out: the men recovered their spirits, and retired well satisfied to their several quarters.

The Lady Clemence also withdrew to her

turret. She would not leave the apartment that her husband had prepared for her; but having bolted the door of the room in which the secret passage opened, was well satisfied that no intruder could advance any further. Indeed, it was not likely that Abderachman would again venture upon a passage which was now known, and doubtless guarded. The Lady Clemence retired to the blue sitting-room. So soon as the door closed behind her, the lance she had held so proudly dropped from her hand, and she threw herself, in a paroxysm of tears, on the neck of Theresa. Once more, she was all a woman, tender, soft-hearted, and loving. In vain Theresa attempted to solace and reassure her. Silently she still wept on; but with no loud exclamations, no reproaches, no violent demonstration of grief. It was a rational, tearful sorrow that could not be comforted.

Again the works of the siege went on, and King William himself superintended them. Again his troops took up their quarters around the castle, and laboured to gain a few yards up the side of the mountain, on which they might erect the wooden towers, and such implements as the engineering skill of those days imagined wherewith to batter beleaguered walls. It was the afternoon of the day after the battle and the capture of Taverna; and gorgeous and luxurious was the silken tent, which had been brought out from the city for his use, in which the king reclined. No longer clad in the dressing-gown and slippers in which we have so often seen him, King William was now richly armed as a knight on the field of battle. His helmet, his shield, his battle-axe, and his lance, lay scattered about the tent, ready to be resumed at a moment's notice; while the

sovereign himself paced up and down, rejoicing in the thought that Mathew Bonel was, at last, in his power, and meditating schemes of cruelty by which he should avenge himself upon his person; while he gloated over the thought of the rich inheritance and the strong castles which the baron's rebellion would enable him to confiscate. The Great Chamberlain, the eunuch Pietro, entered with lowly reverence, and disturbed the pleasant musings of his royal master.

"What is it, Gaieto?" asked the king. "Thy rosy visage hath a look of mystery that sits ill upon thee."

"I have cause to think, monseigneur: perhaps your grace will be able to resolve on the matter of this scroll."

He handed a slip of parchment to his sovereign, who first looked disdainfully at the written characters, then tossed them back to the Saracen.

"Read them thou," he said; "they are in thine own accursed language."

"'If my lord the king,'" read the Gaieto, "'will assault the fortress at midnight, it will be delivered into his hands by Allah and its rightful owner, Abderachman.'"

"By the holy face of Lucca!" exclaimed King William, "that is the name of the villain outlaw who has wed poor Majone's girl. Knowest thou aught more of him?"

"I believe him to be honest and true, and to have some claim, by inheritance, to this castle of Cacabo, which is so justly forfeit to your lordship."

"Honest and true!" repeated the king laughing; "an honest and true robber and outlaw! It matters not, however. But, say; can he have means of introducing us into the keep?"

"I know not, your grace," replied the great chamberlain. "The Arabs," he

added, in thoughtful tone, "are said to retain memories and means in this their ancient country, of which their Norman conquerors wot little. But," he added, as the king's brow darkened, "but in the matter of the assault recommended by this Abderachman, I think he may be fairly trusted."

"By my faith, but I believe thou hast held communication with him thyself!" cried the suspicious sovereign. "Send Odone, the master of the horse, hither nevertheless; and we will take order to comply with the advice of our respectable ally."

The Saracen hastened to leave the tent, well pleased that the sympathies of race and faith which united him to the outlaw had not been further investigated; and sent to summon Odone to his lord.

The evening was now far advanced:

and Abderachman, fully armed, was issuing from the ruined building in which he had fixed his quarters, when something peculiar in the expression of Corazza arrested his attention. He turned aside to caress her.

"Whither goest thou?" she asked. "I know that thy fellows are all marshalled in the wood beside us. Whither go they?"

"To place in thy power her whom thou wilt gladly see,—the wife of Matteo Bonello," replied the Saracen.

A flash of pleasure and anger shot from the dark eye of the little vixen. "And he himself," she asked; "where is he?"

"Most likely, groping, blinded, amid the dungeons of Alcazar, or impaled on the square before it:—so perish all the foes of Abderachman!" exclaimed the Arab fiercely.

"Blinded!—impaled!" murmured Co-

razza. "And is he, then, really in the king's power?" she asked, while she drew aside from the infidel, and supported herself against the rude wall of the hut.

"As truly in his power as fetters and bolts could make him. I struck him down yesterday with a stone from my sling; and the brave Normans then fell upon and disarmed him," answered the other boastfully.

A dizziness came over the mind of Corazza: she pressed one hand to her eyes, then silently motioned with it that Abderachman should leave her.

"Nay, nay, my dove! Arab husbands do not take dismissal from their wives," he added, scornfully. "However, time presses. Give me a kiss, and I will make amends for the capture of the one, by delivering thy friend, Clemence, to the king. He will deal with her to thy heart's content."

He pressed her rudely in his arms, and

stalked forth from the desolate cavern. Corazza stood where he had left her. Silent and thoughtful, she leaned against the rocky wall. All, then, was true that she had heard from the old duenna! for Abderachman himself had been too busy all that day to see her. It was, then, true that he whom she had loved, first from coquetry and ambition, and then out of spite and jealousy that she had been unable to secure him;—it was then true, that he whom, from whatever mixed and contradictory feelings, she now truly loved with all the intensity of her wild passions and untutored heart, was in the hands of his deadly foe! She had lived long enough about the palace to know King William's temper. She was well aware that he would not spare when vengeance and avarice could be, at once, gratified. But how to help and save him? Fallen as she was, to whom could she

appeal? Abderachman clearly understood her feelings, and would delight to see them tortured. The friends of her father, those who, in her palmy days of pride, would have burst prisons or braved the sovereign at her slightest will, where were they? Her wealth, which, in the absence of other motives, might have bribed them, that also was gone.

"No, no! On earth, there are none to help or heed me!" she thought, as she wrung her hands, and tears streamed from her eyes. Her heart was softened for the time. "On earth, there are none to help me; and heaven, oh! will heaven heed a wretch like me?"

She fell on her knees where she stood, and uplifted her hands on high. "It is mockery!" she whispered, after a few moments; "it is a mockery for me, who have spurned at everything sacred, and am

already half an infidel, to pray! But she where is she?" she added, as a sudden thought struck her: "where is she who can move heaven to work miracles, and who once befriended me? I had never thought of Taverna if the holy Rosalia had not first called him to help me. She, too, would have united us, and once urged him to wed me. She—she alone would hear me, even now! And surely she who could make the earthquake to deliver herself from Abderachman, must be able to deliver one solitary prisoner from the king! Oh! could I but find her, and hie me to her! But what avails bemoaning oneself here?" she thought, as a fit of renewed energy came over her; "I must seek her; I must find her, and she shall save us! Rosalia! Rosalia!" she murmured aloud, as she started to her feet, and casting her cloak and hood over her, rushed wildly from the ruin.

"'Rosalia, Rosalia!'—what, in the name of woman, can the wilful animal be after now?" exclaimed the old Saracen duenna, whom Abderachman always kept as a spy more than as a servant to attend his bride. She hobbled to the door of the hut; but Corazza was already out of sight. Not a Saracen of those who had been around the cavern all day, was now to be seen. All was silence and darkness, save where the stars shone brightly above in the moonless sky, and where the watch-fires of the royal army gleamed amid the trees below. The castle of Cacabo loomed in front against the dark blue vault of heaven. The sea-wind swept cold up the valley from Palermo. The hag drew her cloak around her, and, shivering as she thrust her elbows into her sides, hurried back into the ruined hut.

CHAPTER IX.

"The march! the charge! the shouts of either faith!
Hurra! and Allah! and—one moment more—
The death-cry drowning in the battle roar. *Byron.*

It was midnight: and the din, the clangour and the cries of battle disturbed that quiet scene. The royal troops had rushed up the steep ascent, and, step by step, were endeavouring to push forwards the mechanism which should o'ertop the walls and enable them to contend, hand to hand, with those who defended them from the battlements. For to the battlements, the whole garrison had now thronged. Bolts flew from mangonels and crossbows; and flaming darts, tipped with the dreaded Greek fire, streaked the midnight air. The

lady of Taverna, on foot, with a steel helmet on her head, but without its evantaille, that all might recognize her features, with a large kite-shaped shield swung round her neck and a naked scimiter in her hand, moved quietly from tower to tower along the walls, cheering and encouraging the men, and occasionally pointing out where an advancing column required to be met by a greater number of the garrison. In vain her old uncle, Sieur Tommaso, urged her to retire and take care of herself; in vain Richard MacMardagh told her of the danger, and would have placed a pavise, or storming shield, between her and the foe.

"Is the danger greater," she asked, "than that I braved when I entrusted myself to thee and to heaven in the waters of the Favara? I then sought to save only myself. My husband's life is now depend-

ent upon our maintaining these walls so as to obtain terms of surrender."

While this was going on in the outer circle of fortifications, in those which the Saracens had formerly erected, the great keep of the castle, built, in the centre of them, by the Norman father of the present lord of Taverna, rose dark, silent and deserted in the midst of the turmoil. We think that we have already said that it was several stories high; and that, although the lower story contained the great banqueting hall and the chapel, the upper stories were only intended to be used in case an enemy should possess the outer fortifications. At one corner of the banqueting hall was a circular aperture, over which stretched a windlass and coils of rope: these showed that the architect of the keep had planned that it should cover the great well of the castle, so that the garrison would not want

water even when most sorely beset. The battle raged around; and all here was dark and deserted, save that one, in the guise of a Norman man-at-arms, anxiously hung over the parapet and peered into this mighty draw-well. The figure of the solitary soldier was, however, little like the athletic build of the Normans whom he masqueraded. His diminutive form, and keen, sloe-black eyes, were the sure marks of a more southern race; and when he lifted his head with a gesture of impatience, and muttered the exclamation, "Allah il Allah!" no one, who had ever before beheld him, could have failed to recognize the cunning, mean, and yet daring expression of the Saracen goldsmith, Azab, the cousin of Abderachman.

He had entered the castle on the preceding evening with the retreating garrison, after the capture of the baron, and had

skulked, so as to avoid recognition, until the hour for that which he had already planned with his kinsman.

"Allah il Allah!" muttered the disguised infidel, as he listened with an air of impatience to the sound of the outer conflict, and then turned him again to the well. The rope, by which the bucket hung down into the water, vibrated, shaken from below.

"Praised be Allah!" exclaimed the Saracen in a whisper. "Is all right, my brave kinsman?"

"All right," replied the voice of Abderachman from below. "Hoist up the bucket until it rise to our level."

Azab began to turn the windlass.

"Hold!" whispered Abderachman. "Now I am about to swing myself into it. Beware that thou keep firm hold, and wind it steadily up."

By an exertion that taxed the whole

strength of his slight frame, Azab wound up the bucket with its unusual weight, until Abderachman, seizing the windlass overhead, swung himself on the parapet and into the great hall.

"Fool!" he exclaimed as soon as he had gained his feet. "Why didst thou not close the door of the hall, lest others should enter before we are ready to receive them?"

"They are far too busy on the walls to note us," replied his fellow; "and the sight of the closed door might draw attention."

"Go and watch thou, nevertheless," replied Abderachman, "while I draw up the others."

Again the bucket descended, and after the necessary interval another Saracen, armed to the teeth, stood upon the floor of the great hall. Abderachman gave up the conduct of the windlass to the new comers; and, one after another, thirty men were

drawn up and ranged around their leader, —as daring a band of robbers and outlaws as ever congregated in the forest of Monreale. They had again followed the passage by which they had before attempted to break into the turret inhabited by the Lady Clemence: a passage cut, in former ages, by the Greek inhabitants of the castle, who, it is well known, were fond of such subterraneous excavations; and which Abderachman and the Saracens who had succeeded them, until the conquest of the country by the Normans, well knew to exist, and, leading past the turret, to abut at the side of the great well. The Normans, in truth, had discovered that there was a wide hole in the side of the rock, through which the well was sunk; but they believed it to be a natural cavity, or overlapped fissure, in the stone.

"Are we all here, my friends?" asked

Abderachman, looking proudly around. "In the name of Allah, then, let us to our work, and once more wrest our fathers' house from the hold of the Christian dogs. Do thou, Azab, and half a dozen with thee, hurry to the top of this keep, and make a bonfire upon its stone roof of whatever ye can collect on the way that will burn. A flint and the back of thy knife, some tinder, and wooden benches and furniture, will avail more than King William's knights, who are knocking their heads against the old walls outside."

Without waiting to hear the end of what he was saying, Azab and the others had hurried up the narrow stone stairs built in the thick walls of the keep. Abderachman and his other followers waited below, and overlooked the courts and the combatants on the lower walls, from the row of small windows around the hall. Suddenly

there seemed to be a pause in the contest; every head was turned, from the foe without, to gaze at the top of the lofty keep. Anon, the reflection of a glaring light shone overhead, and lighted up the whole inner circle of the fortifications. It grew and grew in brightness, and every stone in the pavement below glowed with pale distinctness. Pallid and distorted with terror, the anxious faces of the combatants turned towards the increasing light, which gleamed from helmet and steel cap, and from sword and battleaxe. Higher and higher evidently rose the flame, and the wooded landscape around started out in the ruddy reflection. The invaders had found a quantity of fuelling in the keep, stored ready in case the garrison should be driven to it from the outer works. From the window at which he stood, Abderachman beheld the Lady Clemence. Inexpressibly beau-

tiful and yet terrible, in the look of despair that came over it, was that beaming face as it turned suddenly from surveying the battle beyond the parapets, and beheld the towering flame aloft. She marked the turbaned head of the infidels who fed the flames, and understood at once that treachery had been at work.

King William, also, glowed in the light of the welcome signal, where he sat on his charger at the foot of the castle hill. "Brave outlaw!" he cried, "I could almost pardon thee, wert thou more moderate in thy pretensions! On, on, my brave fellows: God with us!" he shouted, as he spurred up the steep ascent. "Clap scaling ladders to the walls, and hasten to join our friends within the keep."

"Keep the walls! Defend the walls, my friends!" exclaimed the wife of Taverna, imploringly, as she stayed with her hands

the dismayed men-at-arms who were rushing towards the keep. "Defend the walls, and we can easily deal with the few traitors within afterwards." The men stood doubtful. "If not for my sake, think of your own wives and children who have taken shelter here," she continued, addressing some of those feudatories whom she knew to belong to the neighbouring lands. "Give me thy crossbow!" she cried, as she snatched the weapon from a terrified wretch who would push past her: "Give me thy useless crossbow; these other brave men will not desert a woman who fights at their head."

She fixed the quarrel, and wound up the implement; then, taking such aim as her nervous trepidation and strong effort to overcome it permitted, discharged the shaft, which hit full against the charger of the Count of Calvi. The soldiers around our

heroine uttered a faint cheer, and were again preparing to defend their posts, when the whole company of Abderachman rushed from the door of the keep, and, crossing the great court, silently attacked the rear of those who were battling on the walls. Then, indeed, a cry of terror uprose from the women and children and female peasants, who had thronged for shelter to the castle, and increased the confusion of the fighting men. All orders were disobeyed or forgotten. They fled from the walls to defend themselves against these new assailants; while William's forces from beyond advanced without impediment, and, springing up their scaling-ladders, o'erleapt the undefended parapet.

It is needless to describe the scene of confusion and slaughter that ensued. Hemmed in between the Saracens,—whose numbers were magnified by terror,—and

the royal forces, the garrison, already deprived of its natural leader, defended itself without organization, and was cut down without pity. In vain, that leader's heroic wife nerved herself, and endeavoured to act the part of those female Norman warriors whom family tradition had delivered down to them as subjects of boastful praise. Her exhortations were disregarded by the terrified crew, and she was borne, hither and thither, by the throng and the press. Theresa rushed out from the loved turret they had inhabited, and placed herself beside her friend and patroness. Her features were pale as ivory, and fixed in placid resignation. "Let us pray and die together, noble and dear Clemence," she said, as she wound one arm round the waist of the lady. "*He*,"—she could not pronounce the name, but the emphasis with which she spoke sufficiently declared whom she

meant; "*He* will be slain by the king, and you would not wish to survive him. Let us commend ourselves to the care of the Madonna and the mercy of her Son."

"Is there no chance of saving him?" asked the lady, with the wildness of hope that knows it hopes in vain.

"Yes, noble lady, there is always hope for those who will not despair," ejaculated MacMardagh, as, having seen them from where he fought amid a neighbouring group, he sprang across and joined them. "There is always hope. You can do no good here. Let me save you hence, that you may rally elsewhere my noble lord's friends to the rescue. Theresa, dearest Theresa," he added more gently; "lead on the Lady Clemence and let me support you."

He would have offered to support her, but Theresa desired him to give all his

care to her friend; or, rather, to lead the way, and they would follow, nothing doubting.

"Back, then, to your own rooms, noble lady," exclaimed MacMardagh; and seizing her hand, he hurried her within the portal and closed and bolted the outer door, just as the soldiers, with whom he had been contending against the royal storming party, broke, and the latter rushed eagerly towards them. "The Saracen's secret passage is open and must lead beyond the castle," he added: "let us trust ourselves to it: but instantly, noble lady; instantly, before they have mastered the outer fortress and have time to look into the inner apartments."

They hurried through the blue sitting room, and the adjoining room, and unbolted the door which led into that which Abderachman had invaded. Tears sprang

not to the eyes of the brave women, and Clemence had no wish to linger to indulge fond memories. She carried remembrance with her. They groped their way through the broken wall behind the silken arras, and advanced into the darkened avenue. "Would that we had a torch!" said Richard; "but let me go first and feel the way for you."

He did so, holding the hand of Theresa, who gave hers to the countess: and silently they advanced, as fast as the unknown way and the broken nature of the road would permit. For a while, the passage led them downwards by a gentle descent: then, all at once, turned to the left and dipped down, down by almost perpendicular steps cut in the solid rock. Here they were evidently not far from the surface; for every now and then fissures in the rock let in fresh currents of cool air: once or twice, through

the crevices, they saw a star twinkling in the blue sky above: and often were they startled by coming against long pendant roots of brambles, and creeping plants, and strings of waving ivy, that had grown through the rocky soil, and swung to and fro in the darkened excavation. They reached the bottom of the rude steps, and again the gallery turned to the right and wound onwards, as if following the outline of the rock on which the castle was built.

"We must be nearly at the base of the mountain," said MacMardagh. "Hark to the cries of the combatants!" he added. "Pray heaven that this blind excavation conduct us beyond their encampment!"

"Seek for the Countess Clemence and for the mad Irishman I knighted!" exclaimed the loud voice of King William almost beside them. "Odone, go thou,

and order them to be brought hither alive."

The Lady of Taverna and Theresa shuddered as they heard the well-known brutal voice, and hurried forwards after the adventurer. "Don't you wish you may take us!" exclaimed the latter jeeringly. He fixed his arms more firmly about his person: drew the hilt of his sword to its place above his right hip, and led the way cautiously forwards. Again the passage descended by a rapid flight of steps. They counted thirty of them as they groped their way in what seemed to be more perfect darkness and a closer atmosphere. Then a level gallery led them forwards some two score of paces, and then again it began to ascend by a steep inclined plane.

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Lady Clemence: "we must have passed under the bed of the river, and are now rising within

the opposite hills! Brave Riccardo!" she ejaculated.

"Then we shall come out beyond the king's encampment!" whispered Theresa. She involuntarily pressed closer the hand of her guide which she held. He returned the gentle pressure with interest.

CHAPTER X.

They crept through the passage from Baja's fair shore
To Avernus—the Lake of the Dead :—
In all Magna Grecia, such caverns of yore
Were cut out, and, deep underground, led
From altar to altar, from city to vale,
As at Naples and Cuma are seen :—
They crept through the cavern . . . Hark! list to the wail
Of the spirit, in glittering sheen,
That beckons them onwards! *The Snow Storm.*

THE passage by which our three fugitives continued to grope their way led them upwards and still upwards, sometimes by a steeper ascent, and sometimes by short flights of broken steps, much in the same manner as it had conducted them down from the castle. It was, however, on the whole less precipitous; and Richard MacMardagh, who well knew the country, was convinced that they were ascending the side of the

ravine opposite that from which they had fled. Sometimes it was sufficiently lofty for them to be able to walk erect; but sometimes the rude vault descended so low that they were obliged to bend down most inconveniently as they crept along. During the last few yards they had passed over, the vault had stooped lower than ever; and they all began to fear lest they had missed, in the dark, some more open gallery, and lost themselves in one that had no real outlet. MacMardagh whispered his fear to the Lady of Taverna; and besought her to wait awhile where she was, while he hastened forwards to ascertain whether the passage in which they were now involved had any real outlet or not.

He had not to proceed far. After advancing a few steps, the gallery turned sharp to the left, and he found himself before an opening that led into an outer

vault or cavern. This was evidently inhabited; for rude domestic utensils were lying about; and an old woman was rocking herself to and fro, where she sat, on the ruined capital of a Grecian pillar. Her fan was in her hands, and she saw not the adventurer who watched her from the inner cavity. For a few seconds he doubted whether to advance or retreat, then remembered how precious was every moment, as the Saracen, who had so lately used the underground way, would, doubtless, track them from the turret. He hastened back to his companions.

"We are close to the outlet, dear lady," he said; "but it opens into a hut, where already I see one female whom we cannot pass unperceived."

"It must be risked," replied Clemence firmly. "If we return, or if we stay here, we alike fall into the hands of the Saracen.

Let us confide in the pity of this poor woman. No Christian heart would betray fugitives so sorely beset."

"But hist! hist!" exclaimed Theresa in a whisper: then, after advancing a few steps, she also looked from the mouth of the gallery. "This is not a Christian woman. I know her well. This is the servant of Abderachman himself!"

"It is an unlucky chance; but let us on, and trust to the Madonna."

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed the old hag in joyful tones, uplifting her withered hands as she turned her head and saw the fugitives emerging from the cavern. "Ho! ho! belle signore! So you think you have got out of the trap! Wait a bit! wait a bit! Abderachman knows the burrow as well as you do, and cannot be many paces behind."

"She speaks truth, by heaven!" exclaimed MacMardagh; "and this must be

looked to." He sprang upon her at once where she sat; and exclaiming, "Dear Theresa, give me those wisps of old turbans," he tied her hands behind her back, and stuffed a fragment in her mouth, to silence the shrill screams that she put forth as if she were being murdered. Then binding her two feet firmly together, he said, "Kick and scream now if you can, and like it, mistress; and if you topple off on the floor, it will be your own fault."

The old hag did, however, kick notwithstanding her ligatures; and fell, as her captor had predicted, on the rocky floor of the cavern. The Irishman perceived the great carved stone on which she had been seated; and it occurred to him at once to roll it into the mouth of the dark passage. It did not above half fill up the cavity; but he rolled another and another behind it, being well aware that, however easily they might

be drawn forth from the outer side, it would be next to impossible for any one to remove them from within, where the pursuer must be bent double by the lowness of the vault, and would be so confined on each side as to be almost unable to use his arms. Mac Mardagh gloried in working out what he thought a bright idea, and tarried somewhat longer than Clemence and Theresa thought necessary in perfecting his barricade. It was just completed, and he had announced his readiness to proceed, when the sound of voices came to them from the inner cavity; and Theresa announced that she recognized the well-remembered tones and objurgations of Abderachman.

"May the grave of his burnt father be defiled!" swore the outlaw as he strove in vain to overcome the impediment. Our heroine motioned to the others to hasten away, when an arrow, shot at random from

within, whizzed beside her, and wounded, as it fell, the old duenna on the floor. The three fugitives hastened out of the cavern and into the ruined building beyond.

Daylight was breaking, and the castle of Cacabo loomed in front of them. They all started when they beheld it and understood where they were, and how little removed from the enemies who were thirsting for their blood. Clemence recognized with anguish the turret into which she had been so joyfully led by her husband, and saw the windows filled with the iron-clad heads of rude men-at-arms, whose fellows congregated on the terraced roof, and looked over every parapet. A gibbet was erected in the midst of them, on which swung the body of her uncle, the Lord Tommaso, already executed by command of the king. She saw all this at a glance, although she could not recognize the figure, and shrank

back within the rude hut of Abderachman.

"Courage, noble lady!" said MacMardagh. "I do not think they can recognize us at this distance; but something must be risked. I much misdoubt me if the Saracen will be obliged to return the whole way to the castle. There is, most probably, some other branch of the underground cavern, which we could not see in the darkness, but by which he will be able to come out on this side the river and pursue us. Let us gain what we can upon him."

They all hurried from the cavern and along the shelving path that faced the steep side of the mountain. According to the fears of the two females, they believed themselves to be in full sight of the new garrison that swarmed on its every parapet. But the morning mist and the overhanging boughs of the many trees that fringed the path completely concealed them; and they

turned unnoticed round a projecting ledge of rock that screened them from all danger in that quarter. They knew not whither the slight pathway might lead, but hastened eagerly forwards. It wound round stubs of underwood and thickets of bramble and myrtle, purposely avoiding them, and undistinguishable from the thousand goat and wild boar tracks that ran, in every direction, through the forest. But having followed it from the cavern hut, where it had terminated, the fugitives were able to follow it still; and soon found that it fell into a more beaten track, that crossed it to the right and to the left. They doubted which to follow.

"The path to the right," said Theresa, "can only lead round the mountain, and would take us nearer Palermo."

"But see, Riccardo," said the Lady Clemence, stooping to examine it: "see, here

are tracks of horses' hoofs. Whither can they all lead?"

"And shod like Saracen, not Norman horses!" exclaimed the adventurer. "Step aside, dear lady, into the covert, while I run forward to examine."

"Have a care of thyself," whispered Theresa. She was not aware that she had spoken: but her friend overheard the injunction, and smiled sadly as she drew the young girl to herself and kissed her.

In a few minutes, MacMardagh re-appeared in sight and beckoned to them to join him. He led the way; and again turning round the rock to the right, they beheld a large cavern in which about a dozen steeds, caparisoned in Arab fashion, with high-pointed saddles, were rudely stabled. These evidently belonged to Abderachman and his outlaw band; and had been left here when their masters

groped their way, by the underground passage, into the castle. This was, indeed, a fortunate chance; and with somewhat of spirit and assured hope, MacMardagh selected what he deemed the three best of the horses, and the fugitives were quickly mounted upon them. They turned back upon the beaten track; and, giving the rein to the sure-footed little animals, clattered along through the dense underwood of the forest.

"In which direction, noble lady?" asked the Irishman.

"To my old castle of Beni-zekher or to the convent of San Martino:—to continue the defence or take sanctuary, as I may resolve by the way. They are not far apart," replied the gallant wife, as she galloped in front of the others and led the way along the narrow track.

"It were impossible to defend Beni-

zekher, and the king would not respect sanctuary," observed Theresa. "Better far were it to lie concealed until we can join the other barons in arms."

The lady did not reply, but continued to ride forward in deep thought.

Meanwhile, it had chanced to Abderachman and the three fellows who were with him in the underground passage, as Mac Mardagh had imagined. Foiled in their attempt to remove the masses of hewn stone with which they found the egress into the outer cavern and hut blocked up, they had quickly turned round and retraced the way by which they had come. Abderachman well knew that there was another outlet to the gallery besides that which opened in the cavern of the hut. They hurried backwards for about half of a quarter of a mile: then, when the principal passage dipped downwards towards the river, broke off by a

steep and still narrower gallery which branched from the main one on the left hand. They clomb up very steep steps, and evidently circled the southern face of the mountain. Anon, they came upon a quantity of loose straw, dung and fodder; and, forcing their way through it, stood in the cavern stable which the fugitives had so opportunely discovered.

"One—two—three—four: some one has taken four of the horses, Harem," said Abderachman to his lieutenant, as his eye glanced quickly through the cavern. "It must be a Norman fool who has taken them; for see, he has selected those which looked in best condition and most like their own heavy chargers! Bring forth Simoom for me," he added, pointing to a tall raw-boned animal that seemed all joints and sinew; "and three others of the fleetest for yourselves. Meanwhile, I will speed

round and ask if the lady Corazza can tell aught of the fugitives whom we saw in my cavern."

He hastened away as he spoke, and strode round by the track which our heroine and her party had so lately followed. He rushed into the outer cavern, and saw only the old duenna on the floor. "Corazza!" he exclaimed, as he stepped behind a jutting buttress in the rock and opened a door into an inner room. "Corazza, where art thou?" he repeated, as his eye glanced round the richly furnished secret apartment in which he had collected untold wealth and gewgaws for his bride. She was nowhere to be seen; and he hastened again to the outer hut. "Get up, thou fool, and tell me where is thy mistress!" he exclaimed, as he pointed his foot to the old woman on the floor.

A low, inarticulate groan was his only answer; and looking more attentively at

the old duenna, he discovered the sad state in which she had been left by the Irishman.

"By Allah, it is almost a pity to remove it!" he muttered, as he took the gag from her mouth. "Speak, and tell where is thy mistress, and who put thee in this plight?"

"Unloose my hands first," replied the old woman. "Ah, Satan!" she exclaimed, writhing with pain; "see you not the arrow that you yourself stuck into my arm, that you move me so roughly!" She snatched the knife from her master's hand and herself cut the thongs that bound her feet together. Then slowly rising, applied herself to draw forth the arrow and examine the wound in her arm.

"It was not intended for thee, thou knowest, Mariam; and I am grieved that it hit thee: but tell me quickly who were those whom I heard with thee in the

cavern, and where is the lady Corazza?" replied the outlaw.

"I will tell thee, that thou mayst follow them and avenge me," replied the hag. "Those in the cavern were two Norman dames and a knight in full armour. They came out of the underground passage and fled away."

"Whither?"

"How can I tell."

"And Corazza?"

"Aye, Corazza!—Corazza!" repeated the old woman spitefully. "Corazza played all manner of antics last night after you had left her alone. She bemoaned herself and wept and fell on her knees, and then rushed from the house exclaiming 'Rosalia!' —'Rosalia!'"

"Rosalia!" repeated the outlaw: "sits the wind that way! Then I know where to find her: and, by Mahomet," he added,

"I doubt not they have all fled to the same holy patron!"

He hastened from the hut as he spoke; found Haram and the others with the horses at the appointed place, and vaulting on the spare back of his favourite Simoom, away they all clattered towards the cavern on Monte Pellegrino.

CHAPTER XI.

" O dernier confident de l'âme qui s'envole,
Viens, reste sur mon cœur! parle encore, et dis moi
Ce qu'elle te disait quand sa faible parole
N'arrivait plus qu'à toi.

" Pour éclaircir l'horreur de cet étroit passage,
Pour relever vers Dieu son regard abattu,
Divin consolateur dont nous baisons l'image,
Réponds? Que lui dis-tu?"

Le Crucifix. De Lamartine.

Already the little castle of Beni-zekher was visible amid the tall Italian pines at the bottom of the valley adown which the Lady of Taverna and her attendants now galloped at the full speed of the horses they had stolen from the outlaw. The latter had rightly estimated their wind and power; for, although they had showed no sign of distress, they had proved themselves

to be far less fleet than the fugitives had hoped to find them. Still they came bravely onwards: and the ladies already flattered themselves that they might repose awhile and take counsel in the friendly shelter of Beni-zekher, when MacMardagh, who rode last and who constantly looked behind to ascertain whether they were followed, beheld the gaunt figure of Abderachman and Simoom cut against the sky on the top of the ridge they had lately descended.

"On, noble Clemence! On, dear Theresa!" he exclaimed. "Shelter yourselves in Beni-zekher. Here is but one following us, and I will stop his pursuit before I rejoin you."

"There are four!" exclaimed the lady of Taverna, as she also looked back and quietly counted her pursuers. "Riccardo,

I beseech, I command thee to keep with us. We shall want thee still."

They all urged forwards their horses; and soon galloped through the heavy portals of the peaceful house that our heroine had so long deserted.

"Close the portals, Sieur Gennaro, we are pursued. Close the portals!" she exclaimed to the old chamberlain and the few retainers who were in the castle yard. They creaked on their rusty hinges and were soon bolted and locked with a heavy clang.

"They can never make good their entrance into the castle of Beni-zekher, honoured lady," expostulated the old chamberlain who had looked forth from the turret above the gate. "There are but four of them: and they have only javelins and arrows. Be at ease, and repose yourself, honoured lady."

"There are only four of them, but they can keep watch round the walls until others arrive," expostulated Theresa. "I beseech you, dearest lady, let us go forth instantly. I myself will guide you to the holy Rosalia, where, I know, he dare not follow us. Even if he were to track us, I myself have heard him swear that he would never invade her retreat. We have already passed the sanctuary of San Martino: let us go and hide with dear Rosalia until you can join the other barons."

"Let the horses drink," said our heroine, as she moved hers to the side of a beautifully-carved bason into which a crystal stream of water fell from a pipe in the wall. "Good Gennaro and friends," she added, while the three horses drank a few mouthfuls, "open the postern gate and let us gallop forth. Delay these outlaws as long as you can around the castle.

Make them think that we are still within it."

The seldom-used postern was quickly opened; and, in a few minutes the three fugitives were again urging their horses up the gorge of the valley and towards the upper heights of Monte Pellegrino.

"I trust in thee, my own Theresa," said the Lady Clemence: "but what canst thou know of the retreat of the holy Rosalia, of whom all the world used to speak so much, or of any promise Abderachman may have made to her?"

"I was not at liberty to tell, Madonna mia;" replied the gentle girl: "but you must still trust me, for I am not used to riding as you are, and cannot talk while we go so fast. Turn now to the right and follow that winding track," she added as they passed the top of the ridge of rocks

that encircle the valley in which stood the convent of San Martino.

Without drawing rein or again attempting to converse, they sped along the forest track over which Abderachman had formerly dragged the hermit Rosalia with Theresa and Corazza before the fearful earthquake—that earthquake which had induced him to surrender his cavern to the Saint and to swear never again to molest her. It became more and more difficult as it advanced along the chain of mountains; and Theresa told MacMardagh that Abderachman himself had sent back his horses before they had entered upon it, and had led them the rest of the way on foot.

"I dare not dismiss them," replied the Irishman: "unless the good folks at Benizekher detain them, they may be upon us yet before we reach our hiding place."

They could not, however, ride much

longer. Sure footed as were the outlaw's horses, they could no longer trust them upon the ledges overhanging the sea, and the precipitous rocks and caverns amid which the path now led them, Reluctantly, they dismounted; and, turning the good steeds adrift, started bravely forwards on foot.

"It could not be helped," observed our heroine, as the liberated horses threw up their legs and started forth on the homeward track: "but I much fear lest the Saracen should see his riderless steeds, and so learn that we are not within the walls of Beni-zekher."

It could not, as she said, have been helped; and their only hope was in hastening forwards before their pursuers could learn the direction of their flight. They knew not that the parting exclamations of Corazza, repeated by the old woman to

Abderachman, had already given to the Saracen a clue by which to pursue them. She, indeed, it was who had taken the fourth horse, which Abderachman had missed from the stable, when she had rushed wildly from the cavern to seek superhuman counsel for the safety of Taverna. Accustomed, since she had followed the Saracen, to rude offices from which her imagination would have recoiled in the days of her prosperity, she had been able to unloose the steed and lead it forth. Every well-born female in those days was a horsewoman: and it had been no difficult matter to her to seat herself in the saddle and speed forwards on the road to Monte Pellegrino. She well knew the beaten road to the convent of San Martino; and the path from thence was sufficiently impressed on her memory; besides that, all Abderachman's horses had been familiar with it

when the cavern had been the asylum of the outlaw. Boldly, therefore, she had gone forth through the darkness: boldly, in that her mind was not sufficiently collected to estimate danger or to form plans by which to rule her conduct. She knew only that he whom she had loved, with the flashing madness of her nature, since she had been first associated with him; that he, whom jealousy led her to love still more madly, was now in deadly peril, and that no earthly power could avail her to rescue him. Her weak and thoughtless and infidel mind took refuge in superstition. And heedless whether the strange hermit whom she sought were saint or witch, she toiled onwards and onwards through the darkness, regardless of all those lesser objects of dread which, in a calmer state of mind and body, would have wildered her imagination.

She also had dismounted and abandoned her horse, and had laboured along that narrow path that ran circling the precipices and overhanging the deep blue sea. She had now turned the last shelving buttress of rock and entered the mouth of the cavern. She saw no living thing astir within. Then, indeed, her excitement began to flag and her courage to fail her. The cavern stretched away into unfathomable darkness. Where was the strange being whom she came to consult? Should she find her alone, or in company with angels, or with devils, or engaged in some unhallowed rites? Would she, whether witch or saint, spurn at the misery or mock the degradation of her suppliant, or reproach her with her sinful love for the husband of another? What mattered it? He was in danger, and she had braved all to save him.

With this thought, she again moved for-

wards, groping and feeling her way along the wall of the cavern. She passed beyond a projecting natural buttress on the other side; and light and a new scene opened before her. The light was that of a lamp, hanging in an iron sconce in front of a crucifix. On her knees before it, was the white figure of the beautiful young girl whom Corazza had before left in that wild spot. Her features seemed to be more emaciated, her eyes larger and more languidly placid in their earnest, upward glance. Her whole appearance was angelic—far too refined for earth. As Corazza moved hastily towards her, she rose slowly and with difficulty from her knees, and from the rock bench against which she had leaned. She tottered to another somewhat further from the crucifix, and seated herself upon it. Corazza would not wait to be addressed; but "Holy Rosalia!" she exclaimed, "holy Rosalia! Do you know me?"

"Dost thou know thyself?" answered the gentle female with as much sternness as her placid countenance and evidently-failing strength would permit her to assume.

"No; I do not know myself," answered Corazza boldly. "I am wildered—maddened. But you are the cause of my madness; and I come to you for aid. Did you not urge him to wed me? Did you not foretell terrible woes to him if he disobeyed? He did disobey: but I had loved him first. He did disobey. He is now a prisoner; and the wrath of King William hangs over him."

"And thou," said the Princess Rosalia mildly, "thou art the wife of another. Foolish, fallen young women!" she continued, "if I advised him to do that which would have been for his good and thine, and for the welfare of this unhappy country, I did not thereby release thee from the

ties and the delicacy and the duty which every Christian maiden owns. What matters it to thee that Matteo Bonel should have rashly embarked in an enterprise which he had not power to carry through? He is nought to thee as thou art nought to him. Where is thine infidel lord? Where is the gentle, holy Theresa, into whose charge I gave thee? Look round: and pray forgiveness of heaven and of earth."

Excited by her own feelings, and unaccustomed, like the hermit, to see through the gloom of the cavern, Corazza was not aware that those whom the Princess named had stolen into their presence while they talked. There, however, they stood, together with the three other Saracens who followed Abderachman, and who had overtaken the fugitives from Cacabo at a pass in the mountain where it was impossible that either party could have turned back or

fled. MacMardagh had wished to resist: but Clemence had been between him and their pursuers, and refused to permit him to pass her: while Abderachman instantly bade them all move forwards, for that he had business at the cavern, and would there give the new knight every opportunity of showing his valour.

"Bad, bold infidel!" exclaimed Rosalia, while her pale face and forehead blushed crimson at the unwonted intrusion, "thou didst swear to me that thou wouldst resign this cave to me, and that thou wouldst never again profane its consecrated depths."

"Nor would I have done so, lady, but that you harbour my runaway wife;" and he seized the wrist of Corazza and held it, as in a vice, while he continued. "I have seen too strong evidence of thy power to brave it again wantonly; and if thou wilt let me take away her and these prisoners

quietly, there shall be no need to set Mongibelle on fire or to call up another earthquake."

"Depart, thou bad, bold man," replied the Princess. "Depart with her whom thou hast degraded. Aye, and take the lady Clemence with thee; injure her not nor insult her at thy peril, I charge thee; but deliver her into the hands of the king. He will be well pleased and will reward thee, and will protect her in some peaceful and holy sanctuary. This youth and Theresa, my own loved Theresa," continued Rosalia, as she placed an arm round the neck of her humble friend, who was fondly kneeling beside her—"these two I forbid thee to touch. Lie not in wait for them, nor discover their retreat. Depart, depart, and remember thine oath: tell not to human being where I am. Now and henceforth ever, be the knowledge of this blessed

cavern forgotten and wrapped from all mankind. Away, infidel, away!"

Abderachman was abashed—more, perhaps, by the bold language of the hermit issuing from so frail and fainting a form, than he would have been by the same language, had she who spoke it shown the strength and energy which he had before seen in her. With evidently no more strength than a dying child, she, whom he believed to be a prophetess, issued commands as if she had power to enforce them: and the universal reverence with which he had heard her spoken of by the poor inhabitants of the mountains, and the evidence of her power which he himself believed her to have put forth in the dread earthquake, overawed and cowed him. He stood a few moments irresolute: then turning to his followers, said, "We have secured the prize for which we contended.

This noble lady will be a dainty gift to King William's vengeance. Let us defer our own on the squire."

As he spoke, the four closed round the Lady of Taverna: and, while he still grasped the wrist of Corazza, they all began to move towards the mouth of the cavern. Richard MacMardagh thrust himself between them, but the flash of his sword caught the eye of the princess. "Forbear, young man! I command thee!" she faintly cried. Who, in those days, would have dared to disobey such an injunction? He seized the hand of the prisoner and raised it respectfully to his lips. "Despair not, noble Clemence," he said; "If you or my Lord of Taverna have friends in Sicily, I will arouse them to your rescue." He was pushed rudely aside by Abderachman and his band, who dared not otherwise molest him: and while his own natural

feelings again urged him to raise his weapon, he was prevented resenting the affront by a sudden cry for help which came from Theresa. The Saracens heeded it not, but made their way out of the cavern with their prisoners. MacMardagh flew back to the appeal of her he loved; and perceived, at once, what had detained Theresa, at the moment of parting, from the willing embrace of the Lady Clemence.

She was still on her knees, where she had first fondly cast herself at the side of her beloved Rosalia. The princess had remained seated on the same ledge of rock. Even while addressing Abderachman, and laying her injunctions upon him with the air of a most powerful sovereign, she had felt too weak to rise: and her fainting appearance, and her sitting posture, had still more impressed the outlaws. But the

excitement and the assumed daring had overtaxed her strength; and when she saw them turn to depart, she had fainted away on the neck of Theresa. The Irishman hastened to a little spring or pool of water, that the glimmer of the small lamp showed him in the floor of the damp cavern, and eagerly brought some in an earthern vessel that lay hard by. Theresa bathed the face, hands, and temples of the dying hermit, while she called upon her with the fondest caresses and most endearing expressions of love. After a while, Rosalia reopened those large mild eyes, and gazed around with a look of resignation, happiness, and love, that bespoke the inmost soul of a saint.

"Our good God," she at length whispered, "has sent thee, dear Theresa, to help thy little friend to die."

Theresa checked her sobs, and signed

and whispered to MacMardagh to go in search of a priest.

"No—no:—it needs not," replied the young hermit more firmly. "He must not endanger himself. Think not I have lived here quite supported by ravens, like a saint of old: the good nuns of San Martino have cared for me: and the priest was here yesterday. He shrived me and prepared me for death."

She paused exhausted: then resumed, in more broken speech and fainter tones: "It is such a blessed thing to die!—Think, Theresa—only think:—to go to heaven:—more beautiful even than this:—and God is there:—and the dear Madonna" . . .

Again she was interrupted by a threatened swoon: "Dear Theresa," she resumed, "how I bless thee for having taught me to love God!—Tell him to be good to thee," she whispered, casting a look of earnest sim-

plicity towards MacMardagh; "and, both of ye, pray for poor Rosalia."

She closed her eyes and seemed, at first, absorbed in prayer. Gradually her lips ceased to move: and Theresa would have thought her dead but for the slight heaving of her emaciated bosom. She folded her arms still more closely around her, and strove, with her own mantle, to protect her from the cold and damp. After a quarter of an hour, the young girl awoke. A slight flush was over her pale, pale cheek, as she opened her beautiful eyes and whispered, "I must pray:—I must pray. Let me kneel down, Theresa."

She strove to arise; and seeing her earnest desire, the weeping young woman assisted her to kneel and lean against the ledge of rock. But it might not be. She had not strength even to support herself with the help of her friend: but slid gently

down upon the floor of the cavern. Her head fell reclining upon her hand; but she cast her eyes up to the crucifix, with an expression of rapture and confiding simplicity, as if, in truth, she felt it sweet to die. Her lips moved, and the full dark eyes put on a more and more earnest look of fond devotion, as the eyelids slowly fell. Then a slight tremor and struggle passed over her: and her limbs assumed of themselves a posture of ease and of flowing gracefulness as they composed themselves beneath the folds of her long and ample white dress. She lay as in a trance: but it was a trance of heaven. Heaven had already set its own seal upon those innocent, childish but beautiful features, as they were still turned towards the crucifix with that look of confidence which had surely obtained its reward.

There and thus reclined, the fond legends

of the Sicilian people tell us that her unmoved skeleton still lay when this cavern was again discovered five hundred years afterwards. And there, and thus reclined, an exquisite statue of white marble still recalls her to their devotion.

"The artist," says an English traveller, "the artist has found means to throw something that is extremely touching into the countenance and air of this beautiful statue. I never in my life saw one that affected me so much, and am not surprised that it should have captivated the hearts of the people." *

* Brydone's *Tour in Sicily*—a clever, but bigoted, gross and indecent publication of the last century.

CHAPTER XII.

" Grotte jolie,
Dans ces temps fortunés,
Près de ma mie
Si doucement passés,
Ton reduit solitaire,
Asyle du mystère,
Fut pour mon cœur
Le temple du bonheur."

Fleuve du Tage.

The hope that had been held out to Abderachman by the dying princess Rosalia was at once partly fulfilled by the king. Greatly did the sovereign rejoice when the captive Lady of Taverna was delivered to him by the Saracen; and the latter received a free pardon for past misdemeanours and a promise that his claims upon the barony of Cacabo should be investigated. It was a more difficult matter to decide what to

do with the lady herself. A noble matron and his own kinswoman, she could scarcely be mutilated or done to death in cold blood: and to save himself the trouble of thinking further on the matter, King William was satisfied, for the present, with confiscating the large fiefs which she held and consigning her to imprisonment in a convent. That of San Martino was selected as being near at hand; and, at the same time, retired from friends in the city who might have sympathised with the wife of Taverna.

Here, then, to this lone convent, embosomed amongst the loved hills in which her own castle of Beni-zekher rose, was Clemence immediately conveyed. Of the fate of her husband she knew nothing: the well-known cruel and revengeful spirit of the king, led her to anticipate the worst. Of the success of the conspiracy she augured

ill: for their brother nobles had brought no succour to raise the siege of Cacabo, and the very fact of her being taken, however well guarded, to a retired convent, proved that William was well aware that no rebels were in the neighbourhood who would dare to attempt her rescue. That rescue had been, once before, achieved by the unassisted bravery of a foreign dependant: and she remembered the promise which the same gallant wanderer had given her in the cavern of Mount Pellegrino, and would not all despair.

But to MacMardagh himself it was an easier task to have defied the dangers that fenced in the Favara than to rescue the lady from this retired convent. He himself was now a solitary fugitive with her he loved. A price was set upon his own head and he was known to be pursued by the personal enmity of the king. He had,

indeed, braved the royal anger too greatly to be forgiven or forgotten. Unhorsed and a fugitive, nothing remained to him but his knightly arms of proof and a heart as stout as knighthood ever owned. With these and his Theresa, he had wandered from the cavern—leaving the body of the sweet young hermit to rest where it lay until discovered by future generations;—with these, he had wandered from the cavern so soon as the early daylight enabled them to follow the track which Abderachman and his band had pursued without difficulty in the darkness. Hand in hand, they wandered forth: the stout heart of the knight and the pious serenity of the young girl supporting and encouraging each one and the other.

They had not yet reached the more beaten track at the end of which they had been obliged to turn loose their horses,

when, on turning a shelving rock, they were startled to behold a man riding towards them whose figure loomed colossal through the cloud that still hung on the top of the mountain. Either party stood still at the same moment—startled and marvelling what should be the other. A cloud-wreath was blown aside; and merrily the two fugitives again moved on towards the little old priest who was riding towards them on one of the strong and sure-footed mules of the country.

"Heaven's blessing upon you, my children!" he exclaimed in a cheerful tone of voice. "But, in the name of good Saint Martino, whither come ye and where have ye passed the night?"

"The rock gave its shelter, father," answered MacMardagh. "Is the country open beyond?" he asked, anxious to push onwards and collect friends for the rescue of the Lady of Taverna.

"No, my son, the country is not safe," replied the priest. "The robber Abderachman has scoured it over this very night with his band and some noble lady they held in vile durance, and the king's troops are in hot pursuit of the fugitives from the castle of Cacabo which they stormed but a few hours ago. But now that I have answered your question, answer ye mine: whither come ye? Where, on this mountain, have ye passed the night?"

MacMardagh and Theresa both hesitated to reply, as they remembered the wish of the holy Rosalia and her injunctions that they should not reveal the existence of her cavern.

"I see how it is, my children," continued the priest as he noted their hesitation. "This foot track leads but from one only inhabited spot. Ye have been with the holy recluse of the mountain. Tell me

how fares she? I was with her yesterday and prepared her for death; and would have stayed with her but that she prayed to be left alone with her God. How fares she?"

"She is with her God, indeed!" answered Theresa, unwittingly casting up her eyes, with a look of seraphic assurance and trust.

"Praised be His name!" ejaculated the holy man. "I had not expected to find her living. Return with me, my children, to the cavern," he said. "If ye have cause to fear either the king or Abderachman, ye cannot, ye may not, without sure destruction, go down from the mountain. I myself would look once more upon the sainted one whose trusted counsellor I have been so long."

Short consultation was needed between the knight and his fair companion to con-

vince them that they could not do better than follow the plan recommended by the priest: and again turning round, they all silently breasted the mountain and rose along the uneven track. They soon reached the mouth of the cave; where the priest dismounted and stabled his mule in an accustomed fissure between the rocks. All was evidently familiar both to the beast and to its rider. Then, moving quickly towards the inner cavern, the priest signed that the others should follow him till he reached the spot where lay the youthful corpse, in all the grace and majesty of maiden purity and death. The light of the lamp was flickering low before the crucifix. The priest stretched his hand to a ledge in the rock and drawing forth a can of oil quickly replenished it and retrimmed the wick. Then while a bright glare fell on that snow-white robe and those pale

but beautiful features, he knelt him piously beside it and gazed with veneration and prayer. MacMardagh and Theresa knelt with him at her feet: and, for awhile, all prayed in silence.

"Pray on, my children," said the priest, as he rose and took a book and stole from his pocket. "I gave her all the rites of the Church before she died: I will now read over her the funeral service; for no other grave shall she have than this holy cavern, which she herself selected."

He placed the stole across his shoulders: and, in a low solemn voice, read the beautiful burial service, while the two lovers joined in the pious responses. Then, dipping a sprig of myrtle in a vase of holy water, which the priest well knew to be at hand, he thrice circled the body where it reclined upon that rude floor, and sprinkled it with hyssop as he went. The knight

and Theresa joined in the symbolic rite; and never was funeral service more touching, or performed with more piety, fervour, and hope.

"There, my children," said the priest, as they all rose from their knees and, drawing together aside, gazed once more upon her whom they had honoured: "there let her rest. None but ourselves knew of her retreat in this wild cavern: let no rash tongue proclaim what she herself would have concealed: let no rude hand venture to displace her, till God Himself see fit to make known the grave of His servant. But now, let us think of yourselves, my children," he added, as, taking a hand of each, he led them forth to the outer cavern: "you cannot, as I have said, seek the open country: you must, therefore, lie concealed in this cave until the roads are more secure, and the king's troops withdrawn."

"Impossible, holy father!" exclaimed Theresa, while an unwonted blush overspread her sweet face, at the thought of the solitary house-keeping proposed by the priest.

"Are ye not man and wife?" asked the good man, blushing in his turn as much.

"We ought to be, your reverence!" exclaimed MacMardagh; "she is all but betrothed to me with the knowledge and approval of the Lady Clemence of Taverna: and the holy saint, over whom we have just prayed, joined our hands last night before she died."

"Can this be true?" murmured the priest, musing to himself.

"Does your reverence think that a Christian knight would lie?" exclaimed MacMardagh, fired with the hope of possessing her he loved, and with the thought of asserting the dignity of his order. "It

was not the first time she and the holy hermit had met: they had known one another all their lives," he continued with petulance.

The priest looked inquiringly from the speaker to the young girl. The latter answered not: but her face wore that inexpressible look of calm and holy candour, which ever revealed her happy temper and guileless soul. That expression had ever won upon all who could sympathize with purity and heartfelt joy: and the priest's decision was taken on the instant. "It must be so," he said; "nay, signorita, you are too good and too reasonable to insist upon a difficulty, where heaven itself appears to show how only it can be overcome. If you have no protector, you need one in these wild times: and this knight can only protect you by perfecting the engagement which already unites you."

Once more the old man threw the stole across his shoulders, and once more he opened his volume. He gave his cheerful approval to MacMardagh, as the latter placed the half-reluctant girl beside himself, and joined their hands, as he read the irrevocable service. The words were spoken: the tie was bound: and MacMardagh folded the willing girl to his heart, as he whispered, "Dost thou not remember, when first we met, that I wished the holy Rosalia would present us to one another?"

* * * *

The priest had drawn forth his mule, and now approached those whom he had blessed. "Have you any scheme, sir knight," he asked, "in which I can assist? You will fare ill on this mountain, unless I keep you supplied with other provender than the sweet looks of your lady, although I own they were enough to lead a soul to

heaven: and as you must, in some sort, depend upon me, you had better confide in me. Who are you? What are your plans?"

"I am one, father, whom King William would give a whole meal and half a night's rest to have in his power: and I am pledged to rescue the Lady of Taverna from his grasp."

"To save yourself and wife and another as well!" ejaculated the priest. "To accomplish one of these, were task enough for most people! But I would gladly aid in the rescue of the sweet Countess Clemence of Catanzaro, as we used to call her. When she lived there at Beni-zekher, she was a good friend to our convent and well beloved by all. You will need friends, sir knight, and a fortress in which to assemble them. This cavern would answer the purpose right well: for no one knows of its

existence. But I am pledged to the dear saint who is no more, that I would never reveal her retreat. Come with me a quarter of a mile lower down the mountain. There is a smaller cave, which is equally unknown, and to which I can send you any stray followers of the countess or of her new Lord of Taverna."

This plan was at once approved by Mac Mardagh and his bride, and they joyfully prepared to follow their friendly guide. But, first of all, he made them collect the wallet of food that he had brought with him for the use of the hermit, and some other that was stowed away in the cavern: the iron lamp and the flask of oil, also, he would not have left behind. Then, slinging the bridle of the mule over his arm, the priest led the way down the mountain, and MacMardagh followed with his arm wound tightly round the waist of his bride.

The good priest talked as he went: but never looked behind until he came to a slight goat track amongst some myrtle bushes on their left. This soon led them to the cavern of which he had spoken, and in which he left them with the scanty provision and lamp they had brought, and with every promise of sympathy and assistance.

The cavern was low-browed at the entrance, and dark: but within, it was high and dry, and was well protected in front by a thicket of myrtle bushes. They watched the old priest until he was out of sight; and did not complain of the lodging in which he had left them.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Is there no remedy?
"*Hubert.*—None, but to lose your eyes."
Shakespeare.

The course of our narrative again takes us to Alcazar—the residence of the sovereign, the strong citadel, the dungeon which, like the old Heart of Mid-Lothian in Edinburgh, seemed to be the centre of every pulsation that agitated the surrounding capital. Again King William had slothfully stied himself within its darkened chambers: again the wretched caverns underneath were becoming thronged with new victims to his tyranny or to his terrors. Once more, must we, in imagination, cross through those lengthening corridors and well-guarded

courts to which the noblest in the land were being, day by day, consigned. They may not again delay us. Let us visit one only of the bettermost of the cells, that opens from a dark passage, but has a grated window through which the sun steals from the broad prison-yard beyond.

The jailor, Gavaretto, was conducting, with some show of care and courtesy, a noble prisoner to the wooden bench beside the wall of this dungeon. He seated him with care upon it; and asked, in a tone somewhat less gruff than usual, whether he could do anything more to oblige his lordship. A groan was the only answer of his prisoner, the once powerful Baron of Taverna.

"Nay, nay, Monsignore," expostulated the jailor; "I see not wherefore your signoria should be so cast down. Yours is but the lot of many a noble Norman:

and you will do me the justice to own that I have dealt with you in all gentleness."

"Thou hast done no more than thy duty to him thou dost serve," replied the prisoner quietly.

"No more than my duty!" replied Garvaretto; "by Sant' Agata, but I have not done half my duty. If I had done my duty, should I have basoned your lordship so tenderly that your lady love could scarcely see the mark of my handiwork? Look at the Prince of Capua for example, and some of the other prisoners: their whole faces are one red fiery blotch: but, owing to the kindness your signoria once did me in saving my throat from the scimitar of Abderachman, I held a cold iron mask before your face, so that the hot bason only burnt out your sight without scarring your flesh."

"Indeed I am beholden to thee, good

fellow," replied Taverna kindly; "and if ever it is given to me to see my wife again. . . . To see her again!" he ejaculated: and he remembered his irremediable blindness, and sadly leaned his brow upon his hand.

"If ever she sees your signoria again," interposed Gavaretto, "the lady will thank and reward me for not having disfigured your noble countenance. And, after all," he continued, "what are eyes good for? If your lordship stays under my charge, heaven knows that my basons have deprived you of the sight of few pleasant objects: and if you are a free man once more, you will escape seeing your lady, and everything else that is beautiful, grow old and ugly. No, no: eyesight is a very questionable good to those who have not need to work for their living. If I had fulfilled the other part of my duty, indeed, and hamstrung your lordship, as I was commanded to do, you would, I own,

have been in a sad plight. But I rely upon your lordship's word of honour that you will make believe that you are lame, if any one comes on the part of Matteo Notajo, who is ten thousand times worse than ever Majone was."

"Fear not, good Gavaretto. I am, indeed, beholden to thee," replied Taverna: "and if ever better days dawn upon me, be well assured that thou shalt not go unrewarded."

"Thanks, my lord, thanks; and I will delay the hamstringing until the last moment," replied the jailor. Then muttering something about having to prepare for other prisoners, he took his leave and, whistling, left the dungeon.

An hour afterwards, Gavaretto was in his own small room near the back entrance to the prisons, in which we have heretofore found him employed in burnish-

ing his armour. But, at this time, no such occupation interested him. He was pacing thoughtfully up and down the narrow apartment, as he weighed the obligation he had been under to the Baron of Taverna, against the dangers he was incurring by the kindness with which gratitude led him to treat his prisoner. He almost wished that the Norman lord had no claim upon him, so that he might, without hesitation, work out the will of the savage king. "But I swore I would repay him the life he gave, and I must keep my word:" he muttered; "besides," he added, "he is but half a Norman: his mother was a Greek."

The sun-ray that came through the little window into the room, was interrupted; and Gavaretto, looking up, saw a young female face peering through the casement. It started aside, as the jailor noticed it; and, with a long whistle and suppressed

chuckling laughter, the latter resumed his walk.

"Ho! ho!" he muttered; "sets the wind still that way! And think you, pretty Signorita Corazza, that a cloak and kerchief can disguise your bright eyes from Gavaretto? You forget, you forget that I was your father's and your body servant till promotion came through this baron and Abderachman. The trap is well baited with the love and wilfulness of your nature; and you will soon be here again."

Gavaretto rightly judged the character of his late mistress. In a few minutes, she returned; and descending the steps into the room he occupied, inquired, in a feigned voice, if it were possible to see one of the prisoners, while she slipped into his hand a jewel of great value;—one of the toys with which Abderachman had first won her. The jailor took the bribe in silence,

as if he knew not that he was taking it: and, without speaking, motioned her to follow him. He led the way along the gallery, and opening the grating of Taverna's cell, signed to her to enter, and again locked the door behind her. He rubbed his hands together joyfully as he hastened back to his own quarters. "Another bait in the same trap!" he chuckled. "I much misdoubt me if Abderachman often lets her out of his sight. We shall have the infidel himself here soon in pursuit; and so shall I be able to perfect my revenge!"

Mathew of Taverna was still seated on the bench where Gavaretto had left him, when he heard the door of his prison cell open and close again. He had thought some one entered: but no word was spoke nor slightest footfall heard. He convinced himself that the door had been only opened by mistake: and his thoughts again wan-

dered back to Beni-zekher, to Mistretto, to his own proud castle of Cacabo—to every place that was most endeared to him by recollections of his bride. A ray of serenity passed over his features; and he sighed, not sadly, as clear-sighted memory looked back into the well-loved past. The sigh was re-echoed in deeper notes from the opposite side of the cell.

"Who is there? Clemence! Is it thou?" exclaimed the blinded captive, as he started to his feet.

A hope— a thought flashed through the wilful mind of Corazza. It was, then, true that he was blinded: she would pass herself off as her rival! She sprang across the cell and, seizing the hand of the prisoner, bowed herself upon it. He drew her towards him, and laid her head against his chest.

"Speak, my beloved! Speak, my Clemence!" he exclaimed. "But how is this?"

he added anxiously: "Stand up—stand up, my dear one!"

He disengaged his hand; and, feeling her head and waist, ascertained that she was already standing beside him.

"Who is this?" he cried: "my Clemence is head and shoulders taller than this slight form! Who art thou, maiden?" he said with some sternness. "Who art thou that would deceive a blinded captive?"

Tears burst from the eyes of Corazza; and hysteric sobs choked her utterance, as she sank on the floor of the cell.

"Nay, nay: tell me who thou art!" urged the baron more kindly: "art thou a messenger from my wife? Give me—give me her token—her message. Tell me how she fares."

"She thought not of thee:" at length Corazza whispered. "Else would she have come to thee as I have done."

"Thought not of me!" exclaimed Taverna, emphasizing the past tense which other had used. "*Thought* not of me! Why thought? Wherefore does she not come? Where is she?"

"She thought not of thee because she cared not for thee when thou hadst lost thy power: she came not to thee because she heeded not a captive."

"It is false! It is false!" exclaimed Taverna energetically.

"She came not to thee as I have done," continued Corazza in measured tones, "because she cared not for a captive. But the king has avenged thy cause, and now thou art free."

"And has the tyrant slain her? Oh! my beloved Clemence!" exclaimed the wretched prisoner as he cast himself on the bench and buried his sightless orbs in his hands.

Corazza stood and gazed at him in silence. When she had first sought the prison, she had not planned the delusions that had since offered themselves to her ready mind. But now she thought they might avail her passion, and she coolly determined to improve them to the utmost, as the only means of securing her lover, of escaping from Abderachman, and of avenging herself upon Clemence and upon all. For still her perverse mind insisted that she had the first right to Taverna; that he was her betrothed husband; and that all means were permitted by which she might recover him. When, therefore, after a lengthened pause of agony, the prisoner again raised his head, and, in a hollow voice exclaimed, "Who art thou, woman, who bringest me these sad tidings? What interest canst thou have in the misery of a doomed man?" Corazza seated herself be-

side him and replied with calculated coyness of tone:

"I am thy bride, Matteo. I am thy first love. Hast thou forgotten the once happy Corazza?"

The prisoner groaned as he turned away without speaking.

"Thou canst not have forgotten me, Matteo," continued the wily tempter. "Thou canst not have forgotten the little girl thou didst rescue from the villain Abderachman. Thou canst not have forgotten how my poor father joined our hands, and how happy we were in the Torre de Baych together."

"Maiden, I grieve that I was indeed a party to that delusion," replied the baron, rising with dignity; "but, believe me, the plot was none of my making: the web was none of my weaving which, it seems, kept thee still entangled when I broke through

it. I never loved but one, and thy father knew of my love: he threatened me in life, in possessions, in liberty, unless I would abet his half-told schemes. For a few days, and for a few days only, I was misled: but the spirit of a Norman awoke within me. I ventured life, liberty, and possessions, rather than foreswear my love. I risked them, and I have lost them all. And, maiden, were they all again mine, again and again would I risk them, even with the knowledge that they would again be lost, rather than surrender her for whom alone I prized them all."

"Was Corazza so hateful to you, signore?" asked the young plotter in reproachful tones. "Yet she was bright and sparkling, and people did say she was pretty."

"It was not a question of beauty, maiden," replied the baron coolly.

"And my young heart was to be won and cast aside and sacrificed!" sobbed Corazza. "It was cruel of my father! But now—now that she is out of the way," continued the tempter, "now that that luckless, illegal union is severed, we might still be happy, Matteo. The keeper of these prisons is an old servant of my poor father. He would allow thee to escape with me. We could go to other lands, far beyond the power of King William. There thy Corazza would guide and tend thee. There, perhaps, those dear eyes might again be taught to see. I would smile upon them till the look of old came back, and then they would open upon Corazza, once more a happy child,—a bright, a sparkling, a black-eyed loving gipsy! Dost thou not remember me, Matteo? Dost thou not remember all that was foretold to us by the white prophet on the day when, first of all, we met?"

"Invoke not my memories, maiden," replied the baron sternly. "I have told thee how they are engaged. I would not wrong thee,—I would not reply harshly to thee. Suffice it that I tell thee—no, I cannot tell thee, how much dearer to me are the memories of her than thou thyself couldst ever be!"

Corazza stood irresolute. Could such devotion be? she thought. Should woman plead as she had pleaded and be rejected? Where was her female modesty? Where was her pride? Alack, they were all now engaged—interested in the success of her scheme of love and vengeance. That delicacy of sentiment, that might have led her to shun avowing love, even when it was fondly sought, had long given place, in her mind, to a yearning for vengeance—a recklessness of all beside herself. She was already fallen so low, that she felt that the

opinion of the world could be nought to her. She stood, therefore, irresolute, while Taverna bent his lack-lustre eyes upon her: then turned away with a gesture that had more in it of contempt than of pity.

Another insurrection of the prisoners beneath the Alcazar had been for some time impending; and the guards had been so tampered with by friends outside, that, in truth, little discipline now reigned throughout the quarters. In due time, the rising took place; the escaped prisoners broke into the king's room; and, not without difficulty, were overpowered by Odone and hung on the square of the Cassaro, where they remained unburied, the food for dogs. But this conspiracy was, as yet, only in its infancy: and had no other influence on the times and persons in whom we are interested, than in loosening the bonds of discipline, and in enabling

strangers to be admitted to the several wards. Thus when, an hour after he had left Corazza in Matthew Bonel's cell, Gavaretto was interrupted by a Norman man-at-arms, who handed to him an order from one of the court eunuchs for admission to the Baron of Taverna, the jailor would have given easy access to the applicant, had not his suspicions been already alive to the probable arrival of Abderachman. The scrutinising glance which he threw over the man-at-arms confirmed his anticipations: and he, at once, recognized the Saracen through the disguise in which he had ventured within his premises.

Gavaretto recognized his old enemy at once: and looked doubly sullen and forbidding, in order to conceal his joy, as he marshalled the new comer towards the prison of Taverna. He opened the door noiselessly, and motioned him to the inner

porch or division of the cell. This was always in darkest shade: and the intruder could not have been seen by those within the prison itself. But they were both too much engrossed in other thoughts to hear the opening door, or mark the entrance of the man-at-arms. Corazza was still standing irresolute and crushed, for a time, by Taverna's rejection of her love and of life and liberty at her hands. She was crushed; but it was only for a time. The prisoner had turned from her; but, with a sudden impulse, she again caught his hand and bore it to her lips.

"Oh, save thyself, save thyself, dear Matteo!" she exclaimed. "I will rescue thee despite thyself and despite them all. We will—we will be happy yet; and a life of love with Corazza shall compensate for all these miseries."

She cast herself within his arms, and swooned away upon his breast.

Taverna stamped his foot with impatience, and began to unwind her arms: but a loud oath, spoken at the other side of his cell, arrested the movement; and he turned his sightless eyes towards the unseen and unknown visitor.

"A life of love with Corazza, sayest thou?" exclaimed Abderachman, darting forwards. "Then, by Allah, it shall be a life in hell! Villain, who art ever in my path, and who wouldst now seduce my wife, take that!" he cried, as he drew a short dagger from his vest, and plunged it through the heart of the captive. "I warned thee long ago, when first thou didst come between me and Corazza!" he muttered, as he drew back the fatal weapon, and felt that it had surely done its work.

"Clemence!" exclaimed Taverna, in a loud voice: then added, in faintest whisper,

as he fell back upon the bench, "Clemence, —I die for thee!"

He fell back upon the bench: while Corazza, who, if she had been really swooning, was suddenly brought back to life by the felon blow of the Saracen, started from the falling body, and darting across the cell to where Gavaretto stood, clung wildly to him for protection.

The jailor bore her through the doorway. Then drawing it to, exclaimed, before he closed it, to the Saracen, "A thousand thanks, Signor Abderachman: a thousand thanks for having so readily come into my keeping. Stay there with the other Lord of Taverna till I bring gyves and fitting gear. There is no Lord Admiral to release thee now."

With a surly smile he locked and bolted the door of the cell, and turned him to summon other keepers. Corazza darted

from his side, and fled towards the postern by which she had entered the prison. She was there met by Odone, the master of the royal horse, who instantly recognized the daughter of his former patron, Majone: and insisted upon having her escorted, in all honour, to a place of perfect security.

She was placed in a litter, and, accompanied by half-a-dozen troopers, was quickly conveyed to one of the convents, in which, in those days, it was not unusual to detain females of distinction in honourable confinement.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I pray thee, peace; I will be flesh and blood;
For there was never yet philosopher,
That could endure the toothache patiently;
However they have writ the style of gods,
And made a pish at chance and sufferance."

Shakespeare.

To the newly-married ones in the cavern, many days had not fleeted by on the wings of bridal love and already the zealous priest had sent them word that the Lady Clemence of Taverna had been brought a prisoner to his convent, and that half-a-dozen stray troopers had been stayed in their scattered flight and were lying in wait to follow the unknown knight who should lead them to the standard which some of the rebel barons still raised in another part of the island.

So much had he himself wrought: and MacMardagh, at once, resolved that he would wait for no greater gathering. Once more he proudly girded on his knightly harness: and, with his trembling bride, returned with the last messenger who had brought the joyful news. Theresa, indeed, trembled: for she knew how great were the dangers through which they would have to attempt their escape; but she knew also the certain destruction consequent on prolonged delay, and she hopefully followed her husband.

It chanced that the first fugitive soldier whom they came across was the lieutenant who had led the troop of retainers that had first joined MacMardagh from his own fief; and gladly this one recognised a leader whose prowess he had already seen, and to whom he was personally bound. Onwards they pursued their way beneath the over-

hanging boughs of the forest; collecting, as they went along, the other men-at-arms who were lying hidden in expectation of the summons. Many of these had retained their horses; and those who had lost them had fallen in with others by the connivance of the priest of the convent. By the same friendly connivance, two good steeds were found ready caparisoned in a ruined shed; and on those the Irishman and his bride were satisfactorily mounted. The whole party, now twelve in number, halted in the pine wood, a quarter of a mile from San Martino; and a trusted messenger was sent to call their good friend to a conference.

While he anxiously paced up and down, awaiting the priest, MacMardagh was startled by the loud bark of a dog from amid the copsewood. With many a joyful bound, Mustafa, the old favourite of the Lady Clemence, rushed from the forest and leaped

upon him. They had been old friends in former days; and gladly the Irishman now welcomed the poor brute who, escaped from the sack of Cacabo, had betaken himself to the woods and neighbourhood of his loved mistress's home of Beni-zekher. The priest, however, broke in upon their joyful recognition, and the mode of proceeding was soon determined on. The horses were all removed to the shelter of an overhanging wooded cliff, and there fastened in the evergreen shade, while all the party quickly advanced on foot towards the walls. The inequalities of the wood and the broken nature of the ground favoured their approach; besides that the convent had no battlemented walls from which sentinels could have beheld them. The priest had gone beforehand to open the postern in the northern wall of the chapel, and the whole party were about to make a rush over the

short open space which yet lay between them and it, when they were startled by the quick advance of half a dozen troopers, who were guarding an open litter they surrounded. The curtains were withdrawn, and a female figure within was plainly seen.

"Maria santissima, Riccardo!" exclaimed Theresa in a whisper to her husband; "it is Corazza whom they are bringing a prisoner."

"Let them, dear one," replied her husband; "I shall not interfere to release the vixen."

The new comers loudly blew the horn at the convent gate; and, through its open portals, they saw the whole garrison tumultuously gathered within and crowding to receive them. The gates were again closed, and MacMardagh and his followers hastened across the open space and were soon within the shelter of the chapel.

The garrison, if it may be so called, was gathered in the open court, and, weary of keeping watch over a woman and a convent, was eagerly inquiring such news of Palermo and of the army as Corazza's escort could impart. MacMardagh led half his men round the cloisters to the other side of the court; and when this was done, the priest and the servants of the convent whom he had alarmed with the tale, rushed amongst the soldiers, exclaiming that some one had left the chapel door open, and that the rebels had entered and got possession of the house. The startled garrison flew to their arms; but MacMardagh met their leader as he was hurrying up the few steps to the raised cloister, and, hurling him back into the court, stood alone exposed to the sight of all.

"Halt!" he cried to his men as they showed themselves, here and there, at the

fretted windows of the cloister, and were supposed by the alarmed garrison to be in much greater number: "Halt, and harm them not unless they resist. And you, men, stir not; my errand is not with ye. Awake not my vengeance, which else will heed ye not!"

It so chanced that the only officer in command of the garrison, though it numbered fifty men, and had strict orders to keep regular watch and ward within and without the convent, had galloped that morning to Palermo to escape the tedium of his quarters, and the men, ill-trained to regular discipline and left to themselves, were much in the condition of a throng of passengers in a stage-coach arrested, in former days, by a solitary footpad. Mac Mardagh saw that they were completely cowed; and calling his lieutenant to take the place he himself occupied at the top of

the cloister steps, he went in quest of the Lady of Taverna.

The friendly priest was there to guide him. "The new prisoner, the Lady Corazza, as she calls herself, is already with her," he said; "but I advise your signoria not to tarry."

As he spoke, they were startled by a loud cry from the inner apartment, the cause of which we must go back to account for.

When she had been first brought to the convent, Corazza had been met with all courtesy by the Lady Abbess, who remembered her, as the Lord Admiral Majone's daughter, since the two days she had passed there in retreat with Theresa and the holy Rosalia: she remembered her only as such, and, in order to give her fitting companionship, had led her forwards and introduced her to the room occupied by the Lady of

Taverna. Clemence had never before seen the new companion that was given to her; and received her with dignified kindness: but at sight of her whom she had ever looked upon as her rival, all the devil, if he ever slept, awoke in the breast of Corazza. She remembered her how she had been supplanted in her views upon Taverna: she remembered her how she had been foiled in her father's attempt to keep her rival in the seclusion of the Favara: she remembered her of the last show of Taverna's fondness and dalliance with his bride, when she, an outcast in a hovel, had watched them at the window of the castle of Cacabo. When, therefore, the Lady Clemence came towards her and expressed kindly sympathy that so young a girl should be consigned to pine in the same sad prison-house, Corazza had turned away and then scornfully replied, "In very truth, it ill becomes

the betrothed of Matteo Bonel to hold companionship with the Countess of Catanzaro."

"The betrothed of Matthew Bonel!—The Countess of Catanzaro!—How meanest thou, damsel?" repeated the elder lady in unfeigned surprise.

"It is well to affect wonder," replied the little vixen tossing her head. "All Palermo knows that it was necessary to send the Countess of Catanzaro to the Favara in order to keep her from another woman's betrothed husband."

"All Sicily knows," replied Clemence, nettled beyond endurance,—"all Sicily knows that neither the wrath of a king nor the wiles of a traitor could prevent my husband, the Baron of Taverna, from wedding there where he had long given his heart."

"An illegal ceremony which the king

never sanctioned and which is since dissolved! I have but just now parted from the Signore of Taverna!" retorted Clemence mysteriously.

"Thou hast seen him, maiden?" exclaimed Clemence, going up to her with anxious interest. "Oh tell me, in mercy tell me, how he fares? Did he send me no message—no token?"

"It was not very likely he should do either, when she from whom he had been beguiled was with him in his prison."

"In his prison, sayest thou?" asked the lady.

"Yes," replied Corazza drily. "Love works its way and draws hearts together where cold policy and pride see only insurmountable difficulties."

"Thou darest not to say that my husband loves thee!" exclaimed Clemence with angry vehemence.

"There are few things that she whom love has drawn to a solitary prisoner in King William's dungeons would not dare!" said Corazza scornfully. "Does your proud Norman blood think that we sunny daughters of Sicily can be so easily and so soon forgotten? Look on me, Countess of Catanzaro, and let thy experience answer if these eyes, these glowing features are less likely to win than the cold pale glance of the north."

As she spoke, she cast back her tresses, which had fallen, with her head gear, about her shoulders in the excitement of her anger: she moved them back with dallying hands, whose beautiful symmetry Clemence could not fail to notice; and smiled, through her raven elf locks, with a glance of conscious and witching beauty.

If the devil had awoke in Corazza, the whole woman now sprang to life in the

bosom of the insulted Clemence. She gazed scornfully at the vixen, and memory prompted the indignant reply :—

"Is not this," she exclaimed with coolest irony, "is not this the poor Sicilian girl who, Theresa told me, had sold herself and wandered away with a Saracen robber and outlaw? Could such an one blast the fair fame of a Norman knight!"

Corazza stood speechless for an instant. The blood forsook her cheek, and her complexion became absolutely livid. Her limbs seemed to be stiffening, and she clenched the fingers of her right hand nervously, as she thrust it within the thick folds of the shawl that girt in her slender waist. Then all the blood rushed back to her face and neck; and her sloe-black eyes flashed like living lightning as she drew back the hand, clutching a jewelled dagger, which Abderachman had taught

her to wear, and, with one bound, plunged it into the heaving chest of her rival. That rival fell with the scream which MacMardagh and Theresa had heard outside the door: and there, as they rushed in, they found her bleeding upon the pillowed couch on which she had sunk back: while Corazza stood over her, quivering in every limb and brandishing the gory poignard as if for another blow. MacMardagh seized her uplifted hand: while Theresa cast herself upon the bosom of her friend.

"She belied my husband, Theresa," said the murdered woman faintly.

"Dearest lady," replied her friend soothingly, "surely you, of all women, could have no cause for jealousy!"

"I was not jealous, Theresa," she faintly gasped in reply. "But I am dying.—Make way for the priest.—I was not jea-

lous.—He loved me only—and I knew it was false."

She closed her eyes, and her breast heaved and laboured painfully for a few minutes.

"True love is never jealous," she murmured, as again she opened those gentle, dark blue eyes and smiled with ineffable sweetness. Again her whole frame trembled, and blood began to pour from her pallid lips.

The priest approached and took Theresa's place at her side. She evidently recognized him, and squeezed his hand in token of assent to the words he murmured. Her pious intention sufficed; and he pronounced, in her ear, the usual form of absolution. Her eyes closed the while he spoke; and her happy spirit went to seek above the ratification of his holy ministry.

Happy in that she died without know-

ing what her husband had suffered before his spirit, also, was released by the hand of an assassin.

Corazza stood and marked it all. With unshrinking eye, she stood and marked every pang that accompanied the death of her rival. It was impossible to say whether she repented of the deed she had done. Alone she stood where she had first dealt the blow. Alone; for Mac Mardagh, giving the bloody dagger to the priest, had unhanded her. Bending on one knee beside the corpse of the murdered Clemence, the Wanderer raised her hand to his lips with more than the reverence of former years; and then signed to his bride that they must go. Theresa cast herself on her knees beside the body of her friend and patron, and again and again pressed her lips upon that beautiful forehead and those death-cold hands. MacMardagh

drew her gently away; and they left the room in silence.

In silence, also, his few followers were withdrawn from the places where he had posted them; and once more passing through the postern gate of the church, they escaped into the sheltering forest. The friendly priest delayed pursuit by calling upon the hostile garrison to bear witness to the deed of horror that had been done: and the Irishman and his little party were able to remount their horses and continue their rapid retreat. After many dangers, and with a following increased by the disaffected of many townships, he succeeded in joining the standard of Prince Tancred, Count of Lecce, who was still maintaining his ground in the neighbourhood of Syracuse, and establishing that high character, which even yet, amid the halo of chivalry and romance, woos the

mind back beyond the seven centuries of misrule and of misery that have since blighted the fair island of Sicily.

Who will doubt that the after-life of Sir Richard MacMardagh did not belie the fair promise which his earlier years had given?

Need we record the fate of other personages of our true drama? Need we say that King William gladly availed himself of the new crime committed by Abderachman, as an excuse for rejecting whatever claims either he or his kinsman, Azab, might have upon the estates of Taverna? The royal treasury was enriched, and the infidel was broken on the wheel.

The crime of Corazza was, also, pleaded as a reason for not restoring to her any of the property of her father, the deceased favourite, Majone. A close prisoner in a more easily-guarded convent than San Mar-

tino, she was condemned to pass her life. None knew how she bore her confinement, nor what spirit held possession of her breast. Silent and reserved, she repelled all who would have treated her with kindness; and continued to walk the house with a cold, disdainful air that scorned alike the offer of human and of religious sympathy.

"So lived, so died she."

King William himself succeeded, as usual, in subduing all his rebellious vassals. Some were hung; some, with Robert of Basseville and Simon of Policastro, were driven into exile in Germany or in Greece. Roger dell' Aquila alone was pardoned, in deference to the tears of his royal aunt, Adelesia. Then was the king once more enabled to shut himself entirely in the Alcazar—giving strict orders that his slothful repose should never be disturbed by any allusion to the affairs of his kingdom.

These were abandoned to the conduct of the English bishop of Syracuse, and the rapacity of Gaieto Pietro and the other eunuchs of the palace. At the age of forty, death released his subjects from the rule of a tyrant: and the two remaining children of the royal nursery, the brother and aunt of little Roger, for whom we heretofore bespoke the sympathy of our readers, had to play stranger parts in the history of the world than it is given to novelist to invent.

THE END.

T. RICHARDS, 37 GREAT QUEEN STREET.

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